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What Might Have Been Expected

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WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN EXPECTED.

BY

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WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN EXPECTED.

CHAPTER I.

HARRY LOUDON MAKES UP HIS MIND.

ON a wooden bench under a great catalpa-tree, in the front yard of a comfortable country-house in Virginia, sat Harry and Kate Loudon worrying their minds. It was all about old Aunt Matilda.

Aunt Matilda was no relation of these children. She was an old colored woman, who lived in a cabin about a quarter of a mile from their house, but they considered her one of their best friends. Her old log cabin was their favorite resort, and many a fine time they had there. When they caught some fish, or Harry shot a bird or two, or when they could get some sweet potatoes or apples to roast, and some corn-meal

for ash-cakes, they would take their provisions to Aunt Matilda and she would cook them. Sometimes an ash-cake would be baked rather harder than it was convenient to bite, and it had happened that a fish or two had been cooked entirely away, but such mishaps were not common. Aunt Matilda was indeed a most wonderful cook—and a cook, too, who liked to have a boy and a girl by her while she was at work; and who would tell them stories—as queer old stories as ever were told—while the things were cooking. The stories were really the cause of the ash-cakes and fish sometimes being forgotten.

And it is no wonder that these children were troubled in their minds. They had just heard that Aunt Matilda was to go to the alms-house.

Harry and Kate were silent. They had mourned over the news, and Kate had cried. There was nothing more to be done about it, so far as she could see.

But all of a sudden Harry jumped up. "I tell you what it is Kate," he exclaimed; "I've made up my mind! Aunt Matilda is not going to the alms-house. I will support her myself!"

"Oh, that will be splendid!" cried Kate; 'but you can never do it!"

"Yes, I can," said Harry. "There are ever so many ways in which I can earn money."

"What are you going to do?" said Kate; "will you let me help?"

"Yes," said her brother; "you may help if you can, but I don't think you will be of much use. As for me, I shall do plenty of things; I shall go out with my gun— "

"But there is nothing to shoot, now in the summer-time," said Kate.

"No, there isn't much yet, to be sure," said her brother, "but before very long there will be partridges and hares, plenty of them; and father and Captain Caseby will buy all I shoot. And you see, until it is time for game I'm going to gather sumac."

"Oh! I can help you in that," cried Kate.

"Yes, I believe you can," said her brother. "And now, suppose we go down and see Aunt Matilda, and have a talk with her about it."

"Just wait until I get my bonnet," said Kate. And she dashed into the house, and then, with a pink calico sun-bonnet on her head, she came

down the steps in two jumps, and the brother and sister, together, hurried through the woods to Aunt Matilda's cabin.

Harry and Kate Loudon were well-educated children, and, in many respects, knew more than most girls and boys who were older than they. Harry had been taught by his father to ride and to swim and to shoot as carefully as his school-teacher had taught him to spell and to parse. And he was not only taught to be skillful in these outdoor pursuits, but to be prudent, and kind-hearted. When he went gunning, he shot birds and game that were fit for the table; and when he rode, he remembered that his horse had feelings as well as himself. Being a boy of good natural impulses, he might have found out these things for himself; but, for fear that he might be too long about it, his father carefully taught him that it was possible to shoot and to hunt and to ride without being either careless or cruel. It must not be supposed that Harry was so extremely particular that there was no fun in him, for he had discovered that there is just as much fun in doing things right as in doing them wrong; and as there was not a boy in all the country

round about who could ride or swim or shoot so well as Harry, so there was none who had a more generally jolly time than he.

His sister Kate was a sharp, bright, intelligent girl, rather inclined to be wild when opportunity offered; but very affectionate, and always as ready for outdoor sports as any boy. She could not shoot—at least, she never tried—and she did not ride much on horseback, but she enjoyed fishing, and rambles through the woods were to her a constant delight. When anything was to be done, especially if it was anything novel, Kate was always ready to help. If anybody had a plan on hand, it was very hard to keep her finger out of it; and if there were calculations to be made, it was all the better. Kate had a find head for mathematics, and, on the whole, she rather preferred a slate and pencil to needles and spool-cotton.

As to Aunt Matilda, there could be no doubt about her case being a pretty hard one. She was quite old and decrepit when the war set her free, and, at the time of our story, she was still older and stiffer. Her former master had gone to the North to live, and as she had no

family to support her, the poor old woman was compelled to depend upon the charity of her neighbors. For a time she managed to get along tolerably well, but it was soon found that she would suffer if she depended upon occasional charity, especially after she became unable to go after food or help. Mr. and Mrs. Loudon were very willing to give her what they could, but they had several poor people entirely dependent upon them, and they found it impossible to add to the number of their pensioners. So it was finally determined among the neighbors that Aunt Matilda would have to go to the alms-house, which place was provided for just such poor persons as she. Neither Harry nor Kate knew much about the alms-house, but they thought it must be some sort of a horrible place; and, at any rate, it was too hard that Aunt Matilda should have to leave her old home where she had spent so many, many years.

And they did not intend she should do it.

CHAPTER II.

The Adoption.

WHEN the children reached Aunt Matilda's cabin, they found the old woman seated by a very small fire, which was burning in one corner of the hearth.

"Are you cold, Aunt Matilda?" asked Kate.

"Lor' bless you, no, honey! But you see there wasn't hardly any coals left, and I was tryin' to keep the fire alive till somebody would come along and gather me up some wood."

"Then you were going to cook your breakfast, I suppose," said Harry.

"Yes, child, if somebody 'ud come along and fetch me something to eat."

"Haven't you anything at all in the house?" asked Kate.

"Not a pinch o' meal, nor nothin' else," said the old woman; "but I 'spected somebody 'ud be along."

"Did you know, Aunt Matilda," said Harry, "that they are going to send you to the alms-house?"

"Yes; I heerd 'em talk about it," said Aunt Matilda, shaking her head; "but the alms-house ain't no place for me."

"That's so!" said Kate, quickly. "And you're not going there, either!"

"No," said Harry; "Kate and I intend to take care of you for the rest of your life."

"Lor', children, you can't do it!" said the old woman, looking in astonishment from one to the other of these youngsters who proposed to adopt her.

"Yes; but we can," said Harry. "Just you wait and see."

"It'll take a good deal o' money," said the old woman, who did not seem to be altogether satisfied with the prospects held out before her. "More'n you all will ever be able to git."

"How much money would be enough for you to live on, Aunt Matilda?" asked Harry.

"Dunno. Takes a heap o' money to keep a person."

"Well, now," said Kate, "let's see exactly

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how much it will take. Have you a pencil, Harry? I have a piece of paper in my pocket, I think. Yes; here it is. Now, let's set down everything, and see what it comes to."

So saying, she sat down on a low stool with her paper on her knees, and her pencil in her hand.

"What shall we begin with?" said she.

"We'll begin with corn-meal," said Harry. "How much corn-meal do you eat in a week, Aunt Matilda?"

"Dunno," said she, "'spéct about a couple o' pecks."

"Oh, Aunt Matilda!" cried Kate, "our whole family wouldn't eat two pecks in a week."

"Well, then, a half-peck," said she; "'pends a good deal on how many is living in a house."

"Yes; but we only mean this for you, Aunt Matilda. We don't mean it for anybody else."

"Well, then, I reckon a quarter of a peck would do, for jest me."

"We will allow you a peck," said Harry, "and that will be twenty-five cents a week. Set that down, Kate."

"All right," said Kate. And she set down at the top of the paper, "Meal, 25 cents."

The children proceeded in this way to calculate how much bacon, molasses, coffee, and sugar would suffice for Aunt Matilda's support; and they found that the cost, per week, at the rates of the country stores, with which they were both familiar, would be seventy-seven and three-quarter cents.

"Is there anything else, Aunt Matilda?" asked Kate.

"Nuffin I can think on," said Aunt Matilda, "'cept milk."

"Oh, I can get that for nothing," said Kate. "I will bring it to you from home; and I will bring you some butter too, when I can get it."

"And I'll pick up wood for you," said Harry. "I can gather enough in the woods in a couple of hours to last you for a week."

"Lor' bless you, chil'en," said Aunt Matilda, "I hope you'll be able to do all dat."

Harry stood quiet a few minutes, reflecting.

"How much would seventy-seven and three quarter cents a week amount to in a year, Kate?" said he.

Kate rapidly worked out the problem, and answered: "Forty dollars and forty-three cents."

"Lor'! but that's a heap o' money!" said Aunt Matilda. "That's more'n I 'spect to have all the rest of my life."

"How old are you, Aunt Matilda?" said Harry.

"I 'spect about fifty," said the old woman.

"Oh, Aunt Matilda!" cried Harry, "you're certainly more than fifty. When I was a very little fellow, I remember that you were very old —at least, sixty or seventy."

"Well, then, I 'spects I'se about ninety," said Aunt Matilda.

"But you can't be ninety!" said Kate. "The Bible says that seventy years is the common length of a person's life."

"Them was Jews," said Aunt Matilda. "It didn't mean no cull'd people. Cull'd people live longer than that. But p'raps a cull'd Jew wouldn't live very long."

"Well," said Harry, "it makes no difference how old you are. We're going to take care of you for the rest of your life."

Kate was again busy with her paper.

"In five years, Harry," she said, "It will be two hundred and two dollars and fifteen cents."

"Lor'!" cried Aunt Matilda, "you chil'en will nebber git dat."

"But we don't have to get it all at once, Aunt Matilda," said Harry, laughing; "and you needn't be afraid that we can't do it. Come, Kate, it's time for us to be off."

And then the conference broke up. The question of Aunt Matilda's future support was settled. They had forgotten clothes, to be sure; but it is very difficult to remember everything.

CHAPTER III.

Commencing Business.

WHEN they reached home, Harry and Kate put together what little money they had, and found that they could buy food enough to last Aunt Matilda for several days. This Harry procured and carried down to the old woman that day. He also gathered and piled up inside of her cabin a good supply of wood. Fortunately, there was a spring very near her door, so that she could get water without much trouble.

Harry and Kate determined that they would commence business in earnest the next morning, and, as this was not the season for game, they determined to go to work to gather sumac-leaves.

Most of us are familiar with the sumac-bush, which grows nearly all over the United States. Of course we do not mean the poisonous swamp-sumac, but that which grows along the fences

and on the edges of the woods. Of late years the leaves of this bush have been greatly in demand for tanning purposes, and, in some States, especially in Virginia, sumac gathering has become a very important branch of industry, particularly with the negroes; many of whom, during the sumac season, prefer gathering these leaves to doing any other kind of work. The sumac-bush is quite low, and the leaves are easily stripped off. They are then carefully dried, and packed in bags, and carried to the nearest place of sale, generally a country store.

The next morning, Harry and Kate made preparations for a regular expedition. They were to take their dinner, and stay all day. Kate was enraptured—even more so, perhaps, than Harry. Each of them had a large bag, and Harry carried his gun, for who could tell what they might meet with? A mink, perhaps, or a fox, or even a beaver! They had a long walk, but it was through the woods, and there was always something to see in the woods. In a couple of hours, for they stopped very often, they reached a little valley, through which ran Crooked Creek. And on the banks of Crooked

Creek were plenty of sumac-bushes. This place was at some distance from any settlement, and apparently had not been visited by sumac gatherers.

"Hurra!" cried Kate, "here is enough to fill a thousand bags!"

Harry leaned his gun against a tree, and hung up his shot and powder flasks, and they both went to work gathering sumac. There was plenty of it, but Kate soon found that what they saw would not fill a thousand bags. There were a good many bushes, but they were small; and, when all the leaves were stripped off one, and squeezed into a bag, they did not make a very great show. However, they did very well, and, for an hour or so, they worked on merrily. Then they had dinner. Harry built a fire. He easily found dry branches, and he had brought matches and paper with him. At a little distance under a great pine-tree, Kate selected a level place, and cleared away the dead leaves and the twigs, leaving a smooth table of dry and fragrant pine-needles. On this she spread the cloth, which was a napkin. Then she took from the little basket she had brought with her a cake

of corn-meal, several thick and well-buttered slices of wheat bread, some hard-boiled eggs, a little paper of pepper and salt, a piece of cheese, and some fried chicken. When this was spread out (and it would not all go on the cloth), Harry came, and looked at the repast.

"What is there to cook?" said he.

Kate glanced over her table, with a perplexed look upon her countenance, and said, "I don't believe there is anything to cook."

"But we ought to cook something," said Harry. "Here is a splendid fire. What's the good of camping out if you don't cook things?"

"But everything is cooked," said Kate.

"So it seems," said Harry, in a somewhat discouraged tone. Had he built that beautiful fire for nothing? "We ought to have brought along something raw," said he. "It is ridiculous eating a cold dinner with a splendid fire like that."

"We might catch some fish," said Kate; "we should have to cook *them*."

"Yes," said Harry, "but I brought no lines."

So, as there was nothing else to be done,

they ate their dinner cold, and when they had finished, Kate cleared off the table by giving the napkin a flirt, and they were ready for work again. But first they went to look for a spring, where they could get a drink. In about half an hour they found a spring, and some wild plums, and some blackberries, and a grapevine (which would surely be full of grapes in the fall, and was therefore a vine to be remembered), and a stone, which Kate was quite certain was an Indian arrow-head, and some tracks in the white sand, which must have been made by some animal or other, although neither of them was able to determine exactly what animal.

When they returned to the pine-tree, Kate took up her bag. Harry followed her example, but somewhat slowly, as if he were thinking of something else.

"I tell you, Harry," said Kate, "suppose you take your gun and go along the creek and see what that was that made the tracks. If it was anything with fur on it, it would come to more than the sumac. I will stay here, and go on filling my bag."

"Well," said Harry, after a moment's hesita-

tion, "I might go a little way up the creek. I needn't be gone long. I would certainly like to find that creature, if I can."

"All right," said Kate; "I think you'll find it."

So Harry loaded his gun, and hurried off to find the tracks of the mysterious, and probably fur-covered animal.

Kate worked away cheerfully, singing a little song, and filling her bag with the sumac-leaves. It was now much warmer, and she began to find that sumac picking, all alone, was not very interesting, and she hoped that Harry would soon find his animal, whatever it was. Then, after picking a little longer, she thought she would sit down, and rest awhile. So she dragged her bag to the pine-tree, and sat down, leaning her back against the tall trunk. She took her bag of sumac in her arms, and lifted it up, trying to estimate its weight.

"There must be ten pounds here!" she said. "No—it don't feel very heavy, but then there are so many of the leaves. It ought to weigh fifteen pounds. And they will be a cent a pound if we take pay in trade, and three-quarters of a

cent if we want cash. But, of course, we will take things in trade."

And then she put down the bag, and began to calculate.

"Fifteen pounds, fifteen cents, and at seventy-seven and three-quarter cents per week, that would support Aunt Matilda nearly a day and a half; and then, if Harry has as much more, that will keep her almost three days; and if we pick for two hours longer, when Harry comes back, we may get ten pounds more apiece, which will make it pretty heavy; but then we won't have to come again for nearly five days; and if Harry shoots an otter, I reckon he can get a dollar for the skin—or a pair of gloves of it—kid gloves, and my pink dress—and we'll go in the carriage—two horses—four horses—a prince with a feather—some butterflies—" and Kate was asleep.

When Kate awoke, she saw by the sun that she had been asleep for several hours. She sprang to her feet. "Where is Harry?" she cried. But nobody answered. Then she was frightened, for he might be lost. But soon she reflected that that was very ridiculous, for neither

of them could be lost in that neighborhood, which they knew so well. Then she sat down and waited, quite anxiously, it must be admitted. But Harry did not come, and the sun sank lower. Presently she rose with an air of determination.

"I can't wait any longer," she said, "or it will be dark before I get home. Harry has followed that thing up the creek ever so far, and there is no knowing when he will get back, and it won't do for me to stay here. I'll go home, and leave a note for him."

She put her hand in her pocket, and there was Harry's pencil, which she had borrowed in the morning and forgot to return, and also the piece of paper on which she had made her calculation of the cost of Aunt Matilda's board. The back of this would do very well for a note. So she wrote on it:

I am going home, for it is getting late. I shall go back by the same road we came. Your sumac-bag is in the bushes between the tree and the creek. Bring this piece of paper with you, as it has Aunt Matilda's expenses on the outside.

KATE.

This note she pinned up against the pine

tree, where Harry could not fail to see it. Then she hid her brother's sumac-bag in the bushes, and, shouldering her own bag, which, by-the-way, did not weigh so many pounds as she thought it did, set out for home.

CHAPTER IV.

KATE, VERY NATURALLY, IS ANXIOUS.

KATE hurried through the woods, for she was afraid she would not reach home until after dark, and indeed it was then quite like twilight in the shade of the great trees around her. The road on which she was walking was, however, clear and open, and she was certain she knew the way. As she hastened on, she could not help feeling that she was wasting this delightful walk through the woods. Her old friends were around her, and though she knew them all so well, she could not stop to spend any time with them. There were the oaks—the black-oak with its shining many-pointed leaves, the white-oak with its lighter green though duller-hued foliage, and the chestnut-oak with its long and thickly clustered leaves. Then there were the sweet-gums, fragrant and star-leaved, and the black-gum, tough, dark, and unpretending.

No little girl in the county knew more about the trees of her native place than Kate; for she had made good use of her long rides through the country with her father. Here were the chin-capin-bushes, like miniature chestnut-trees, and here were the beautiful poplars. She knew them by their bright leaves, which looked as though they had been snipped off at the top with a pair of scissors. And here, right in front of her, was Uncle Braddock. She knew him by his many-colored dressing-gown, without which he never appeared in public. It was one of the most curious dressing-gowns ever seen, as Uncle Braddock was one of the most curious old colored men ever seen. The gown was not really as old as its wearer, but it looked older. It was composed of about a hundred pieces of different colors and patterns—red, green, blue, yellow, and brown; striped, spotted, plain, and figured with flowers and vines. These pieces, from year to year, had been put on as patches, and some of them were quilted on, and some were sewed, and some were pinned. The gown was very long and came down to Uncle Braddock's heels, which were also very long and bobbed out under the

bottom of the gown as if they were trying to kick backward. But Uncle Braddock never kicked. He was very old and he had all the different kinds of rheumatism, and walked bent over nearly at right-angles, supporting himself by a long cane like a bean-pole, which he grasped in the middle. There was probably no particular reason why he should bend over so very much, but he seemed to like to walk in that way, and nobody objected. He was a good old soul, and Kate was delighted to see him.

"Uncle Braddock!" she cried.

The old man stopped and turned around, almost standing up straight in his astonishment at seeing the young girl alone in the woods.

"Why, Miss Kate!" he exclaimed, as she came up with him, "what in the world is you doin' h'yar?"

"I've been gathering sumac," said Kate, as they walked on together, "and Harry's gone off, and I couldn't wait any longer and I'm just as glad as I can be to see you, Uncle Braddock, for I was beginning to be afraid, because its getting dark so fast, and your dressing-gown looked prettier to me than all the trees when I first

caught sight of it. But I think you ought to have it washed, Uncle Braddock."

"Wash him!" said Uncle Braddock, with a chuckle, as if the suggestion was a very funny joke; "dat wouldn't do, no how. He'd wash all to bits, and the pins would stick 'em in the hands. Couldn't wash him, Miss Kate; it's too late for dat now. Might have washed him before de war, p'raps. We was stronger, den. But what you getherin sumac for, Miss Kate? If you white folks goes pickin' it all, there won't be none lef' soon fur de cull'ed people, dat's mighty certain."

"Why, I'm picking it for the colored people," said Kate, "at least for one colored person."

"Why don't you let 'em pick it the'rselves?" asked the old man.

"Because Aunt Matilda can't do it," said Kate.

"Is dat sumac fur Aunt Matilda?" said Uncle Braddock.

"Yes, it is," said Kate, "and Harry's been gathering some, and we're going to pick enough to get her all she wants. Harry and I intend to

take care of her now. You know they were going to send her to the alms-house."

"Well, I declar!" exclaimed the old man. "I neber did hear de like o' dat afore. Why, you all isn't done bein' tuk care of you'selves." Kate laughed, and explained their plans, getting quite enthusiastic about it.

"Lem me carry dat bag," said Uncle Braddock. "Oh no!" said Kate, "you're too old to be carrying bags."

"Jis lem me hab it," said he; "it's trouble enuf fur me to get along, anyway, and a bag or two don't make no kind o' dif'rence."

Kate found herself obliged to consent, and as the bag was beginning to feel very heavy for her, and as it didn't seem to make the slightest difference, as he had said, to Uncle Braddock, she was very glad to be rid of it.

But when at last they reached the village, and Uncle Braddock went over the fields to his cabin, Kate ran into the house, carrying her bag with ease, for she was excited by the hope that Harry had come home by some shorter way, and that she should find him in the house.

But there was no Harry there. And soon it was night, and yet he did not come.

Matters now looked serious, and about nine o'clock Mr. Loudon, with two of the neighbors, started out into the woods to look for Aunt Matilda's young guardian.

Kate's mother was away on a visit to her relations in another county, and so the little girl passed the night on the sofa in the parlor, with a colored woman asleep on the rug before the fire-place. Kate would not go to bed. She determined to stay awake until Harry should come home. But the sofa-cushions became more and more pleasant, and very soon she was dreaming that Harry had shot a giraffe, and had skinned it, and had stuffed the skin full of sumac-leaves, and that he and she were pulling it through the woods, and that the legs caught in the trees and they could not get it along, and then she woke up. It was bright daylight. But Harry had not come!

There was no news. Mr. Loudon and his friends were still absent. Poor Kate was in despair, and could not touch the breakfast, which was prepared at the usual hour.

About nine o'clock a company of negro sumac gatherers appeared on the road which passed Mr. Loudon's house. It was a curious party. On a rude cart, drawn by two little oxen, was a pile of bags filled with sumac-leaves, which were supported by poles stuck around the cart and bound together by ropes. On the top of the pile sat a negro, plying a long whip and shouting to the oxen. Behind the cart, and on each side of it, were negroes, men and women, carrying huge bales of sumac on their heads. Bags, pillow-cases, bed-ticks, sheets and coverlets had been called into requisition to hold the precious leaves. Here was a woman with a great bundle on her head, which sank down so as to almost entirely conceal her face; and near her was an old man who supported on his bare head a load that looked heavy enough for a horse. Even little children carried bundles considerably larger than themselves, and all were laughing and talking merrily as they made their way to the village store at the cross-roads.

Kate ran eagerly out to question these people. They must certainly have seen Harry.

The good-natured negroes readily stopped

to talk with Kate. The ox-driver halted his team, and every head-burdened man, woman, and child clustered around her, until it seemed as if sumac clouds had spread between her and the sky, and had obscured the sun.

But no one had seen Harry. In fact, this company, with the accumulated proceeds of a week's sumac gathering, had come from a portion of the county many miles from Crooked Creek, and of course, they could bring no news to Kate.

CHAPTER V.

The Turkey-Hunter.

WHEN Harry left Kate, he quietly walked by the side of Crooked Creek, keeping his eyes fixed on the tracks of the strange animal, and his thumb on the hammer of the right-hand barrel of his gun. Before long the tracks disappeared, and disappeared, too, directly in front of a hole in the bank; quite a large hole, big enough for a beaver or an otter. This was capital luck! Harry got down on his hands and knees and examined the tracks. Sure enough, the toes pointed toward the hole. It must be in there!

Harry cocked his gun and sat and waited. He was as still as a dead mouse. There was no earthly reason why the creature should not come out, except perhaps that it might not want to come out. At any rate, it could not know that Harry was outside waiting for it.

He waited a long time without ever thinking how the day was passing on ; and it began to be a little darkish, just a little, before he thought that perhaps he had better go back to Kate.

But it might be just coming out, and what a shame to move! A skin that would bring five dollars was surely worth waiting for a little while longer, and he might never have such another chance. He certainly had never had such a one before.

And so he still sat and waited, and pretty soon he heard something. But it was not in the hole—not near him at all. It was farther along the creek, and sounded like the footsteps of some one walking stealthily.

Harry looked around quickly, and, about thirty yards from him, he saw a man with a gun. The man was now standing still, looking steadily at him. At least Harry thought he was, but there was so little light in the woods by this time that he could not be sure about it. What was that man after? Could he be watching him?

Harry was afraid to move. Perhaps the man mistook him for some kind of an animal. To be sure, he could not help thinking that boys were

animals, but he did not suppose the man would want to shoot a boy, if he knew it. But how could any one tell that Harry was a boy at that distance, and in that light.

Poor Harry did not even dare to call out. He could not speak without moving something, his lips any way, and the man might fire at the slightest motion. He was so quiet that the musk-rat—it was a musk-rat that lived in the hole—came out of his house, and seeing the boy so still, supposed he was nothing of any consequence, and so trotted noiselessly along to the water and slipped in for a swim. Harry never saw him. His eyes were fixed on the man.

For some minutes longer—they seemed like hours—he remained motionless. And then he could bear it no longer.

"Hel-low!" he cried.

"Hel-low!" said the man.

Then Harry got up trembling and pale, and the man came toward him.

"Why, I didn't know what you were," said the man.

"Tony Kirk!" exclaimed Harry. Yes, it

was Tony Kirk, sure enough, a man who would never shoot a boy—if he knew it.

"What are you doing here," asked Tony, "a-squattin' in the dirt at supper-time?"

Harry told him what he was doing, and how he had been frightened, and then the remark about supper-time made him think of his sister. "My senses!" he cried, "there's Kate! she must think I'm lost."

"Kate!" exclaimed Tony. "What Kate? You don't mean your sister!"

"Yes, I do," said Harry; and away he ran down the shore of the creek. Tony followed, and when he reached the big pine-tree, there was Harry gazing blankly around him.

"She's gone!" faltered the boy.

"I should think so," said Tony, "if she knew what was good for her. What's this?" His quick eyes had discovered the paper on the tree.

Tony pulled the paper from the pine trunk and tried to read it, but Harry was at his side in an instant, and saw it was Kate's writing. It was almost too dark to read it, but he managed, by holding it toward the west, to make it out.

"She's gone home," he said, "and I must be after her;" and he prepared to start.

"Hold up!" cried Tony; "I'm going that way. And so you've been getherin' sumac." Harry had read the paper aloud. "There's no use o' leavin' yer bag. Git it out o' the bushes, and come along with me."

Harry soon found his bag, and then he and Tony set out along the road.

"What are you after?" asked Harry.

"Turkeys," said Tony.

Tony Kirk was always after turkeys. He was a wild-turkey hunter by profession. It is true there were seasons of the year when he did not shoot turkeys, but although at such times he worked a little at farming and fished a little, he nearly always found it necessary to do something that related to turkeys. He watched their haunts, he calculated their increase, he worked out problems which proved to him where he would find them most plentiful in the fall, and his mind was seldom free from the consideration of the turkey question.

"Isn't it rather early for turkeys?" asked Harry.

"Well, yes," said Tony, "but I'm tired o' waitin."

"I'm goin' to make a short cut," continued Tony, striking out of the road into a narrow path in the woods. "You can save half a mile by comin' this way."

So Harry followed him. . .

"I don't mind takin' you," said Tony, "fur I know you kin keep a secret. My turkey-blind is over yander;" and as he said this he put his hand into his coat pocket and pulled out a handful of shelled corn, which he began to scatter along the path, a grain or two at a time. After ten or fifteen minutes' walking, Tony scattering corn all the way, they came to a mass of oak and chestnut boughs, piled up on one side of the path like a barrier. This was the turkey-blind. It was four or five feet high, and behind it Tony was accustomed to sit in the early gray of the morning, waiting for the turkeys which he hoped to entice that way by means of his long line of shelled corn.

"You see I build my blind," said he to Harry, "and then I don't come here till I've sprinkled my corn for about a week, and got the

turkeys used to comin' this way after it. Then I get back o' that thar at night and wait till the airly mornin', when they're sartin to come gobblin' along, till I can get a good crack at 'em." With this he sat down on a log, which Harry could scarcely see, so dark was it in the woods by this time.

"Are you tired?" said Harry.

"No," answered Tony; "I'm goin' to stop here. I want to be ready fur 'em before it begins to be light."

"But how am I to get home?" said Harry.

"Oh, jist keep straight on in that track. It'll take yer straight to the store, ef ye don't turn out uv it."

"Can't you come along and show me?" said Harry. "I can't find the way through these dark woods."

"It's easy enough," said Tony, striking a match to light his pipe. "I could find my way with my eyes shut. And it would not do fur me to go. I'll make too much noise comin' back. There's no knowin' how soon the turkeys will begin to stir about."

"Then you oughtn't to have brought me here," said Harry, much provoked.

"I wanted to show you a short way home," said Tony, puffing away at his pipe.

Harry answered not a word, but set out along the path. In a minute or two he ran against a tree; then he turned to the right and stumbled over a root, dropping his bag and nearly losing his hold of his gun. He was soon convinced that it was all nonsense to try to get home by that path, and he slowly made his way back to Tony.

"I'll tell ye what it is," said the turkey-hunter, "ef you think you'd hurt yerself findin' yer way home, and I thought you knew the woods better than that, you might as well stay here with me. I'll take you home bright an' airly. You needn't trouble yerself about yer sister. She's home long ago. It must have been bright daylight when she wrote on that paper, and she could keep the road easy enough"

Harry said nothing, but sat down on the other end of the log. Tony did not seem to notice his vexation, but talked to him, explaining the mysteries of turkey-hunting and the

delight of spending a night in the woods, where everything was so cool and dry and still. "There's no nonsense here," said Tony. "Ef there's any place where a feller kin have peace and comfert, it's in the woods, at night."

By degrees Harry became interested and forgot his annoyance. Kate was certainly safe at home, and as it was impossible for him to find his way out of the depths of the woods, he might as well be content. He could not even hope to regain the road by the way they came.

When Tony had finished his pipe he took Harry behind his blind. "All you have to do," said he, "is jist to peep over here and level your gun along that path, keepin' yer eye fixed straight in front of you, and after awhile you can begin to see things. Suppose that dark lump down yander was a turkey. Just look at it long enough and you kin make it out. You see what I mean, don't you?"

"Yes," said Harry, peeping over the blind; "I see it;" and then, with a sudden jump, he whispered, "Tony! it's moving." Tony did not answer for a moment, and then he hurriedly whispered back, "That's so! It *is* moving."

CHAPTER VI.

TONY STRIKES OUT.

THERE was no doubt about it; something *was* moving. There was a rise in the ground a short distance in front of the turkey-blind, and a little patch of dark sky was visible between the trees. Across this bit of sky something dark was slowly passing.

"Ye kin see 'most anything in the darkest night," whispered Tony, "ef ye kin only git the sky behind it. But that's no turkey."

"What do you think it is?" said Harry, softly. "It's big enough for a turkey."

"Too big," said Tony. "Let's git after it. You slip along the path, and I'll go round ahead of it. Feel yer way, and don't make no noise if ye run agin anything. And mind this"—and here Tony spoke in one of the most impressive of whispers—"don't you fire till yer *dead certain* what it is."

With this Tony slipped away into the darkness, and Harry, grasping his gun, set out to feel his way. He felt his way along the path for a short time, and then he felt his way out of it. Then he crept into a low, soft place, full of ferns, and out of that he carefully felt his way into a big bush, where he knocked off his hat. When he found his hat, which took him some time, he gradually worked himself out into a place where the woods were a little more open, and there he caught another glimpse of the sky just at the top of the ridge. There was something dark against the sky, and Harry watched it for a long time. At last, as it did not move at all, he came to the conclusion that it must be a bush, and he was entirely correct. For an hour or two he quietly crept among the trees, hoping he would either find the thing that was moving or get back to the turkey-blind. Several times something that he was sure was an "old har," as hares are often called in Virginia, rushed out of the bushes near him; and once he heard a quick rustling among the dead leaves that sounded as if it were made by a black snake, but it might as well have been a Chinese pagoda on wheels, for

all he could see of it. At last he became very tired, and sat down to rest with his back against a big tree. There he soon began to nod, and, without the slightest intention of doing anything of the kind, he went to sleep just as soundly as if he had been in his bed at home. And this was not at all surprising, considering the amount of walking and creeping that he had done that day and night.

When he awoke it was daylight. He sprang to his feet and found he was very stiff in the legs, but that did not prevent him from running this way and that to try and find some place in the woods with which he was familiar. Before long he heard what he thought was something splashing in water, and, making his way toward the sound, he pushed out on the bank of Crooked Creek.

The creek was quite wide at this point, and out near the middle of it he saw Tony's head. The turkey-hunter was swimming hand-over-hand, "dog-fashion," for the shore. Behind him was a boat, upside-down, which seemed just on the point of sinking out of sight.

"Hel-low, there!" cried Harry; "what's the matter, Tony?"

Tony never answered a word, but spluttered and puffed, and struck out slowly but vigorously for the bank.

"Wait a minute," cried Harry, wildly excited, "I'll reach you a pole."

But Tony did not wait, and Harry could find no pole. When he turned around from his hurried search among the bushes, the turkey-hunter had found bottom, and was standing with his head out of water. But the bottom was soft and muddy, and he flopped about dolefully when he attempted to walk to the bank. Harry reached his gun out toward him, but Tony, with a quick jerk of his arm, motioned it away.

"I'd rather be drownded than shot," he spluttered. "I don't want no gun-muzzles pinted at me. Take a-hold of that little tree, and then reach me your hand."

Harry seized a young tree that grew on the very edge of the bank, and as soon as Tony managed to flop himself near enough, Harry leaned over and took hold of his outstretched hand and gave him a jerk forward with all his

strength. Over went Tony, splash on his face in the water, and Harry came very near going in head-foremost on top of him. But he recovered himself, and, not having loosed his grip of Tony's hand, he succeeded, with a mighty effort, in dragging the turkey-hunter's head out of the water; and, after a desperate struggle with the mud, Tony managed to get on his feet again.

"I don't know," said he, blowing the water out of his mouth and shaking his dripping head, "but what I'd 'most as lieve be shot as ducked that way. Don't you jerk so hard again. Hold steady, and let me pull."

Harry took a still firmer grasp of the tree and "held steady," while Tony gradually worked his feet through the sticky mud until he reached the bank, and then he laboriously clambered on shore.

"How did it happen?" said Harry. "How did you get in the water?"

"Boat upsot," said Tony, seating himself, all dripping with water and mud, upon the bank.

"Why, you came near being drowned," said Harry, anxiously.

"No I didn't," answered Tony, pulling a big

bunch of weeds and rubbing his legs with them "I kin swim well enough, but a fellar has a rough time in the water with big boots on and his pockets full o' buck-shot."

"Couldn't you empty the shot out?" asked Harry.

"And lose it all?" asked Tony, with an aggrieved expression upon his watery face.

"But how did it happen?" Harry earnestly inquired. "What were you doing in the boat?"

Tony did not immediately answer. He rubbed at his legs, and then he tried to wipe his face with his wet coat-sleeve, but finding that only made matters worse, he accepted Harry's offer of his handkerchief, and soon got his countenance into talking order.

"Why, you see," said he, "I kept on up the creek till I got opposite John Walker's cabin, where it's narrow, and there's a big tree a-lyin' across—"

"Still following that thing?" interrupted Harry.

"Yes," said Tony; "an' then I got over on the tree and kep' down the creek—"

"Still following?" asked Harry.

"Yes; and I got a long ways down, and had one bad tumble, too, in a dirty little gully; and it was pretty nigh day when I turned to come back. An' then when I got up here I thought I would look fur John Walker's boat—fur I knew he kept it tied up somewhere down this way—and save myself all that walk. I found the ole boat—"

"And how did it upset?" said Harry.

"Humph!" said Tony; "easy enough. I hadn't nuthin to row with but a bit o' pole, and I got a sorter cross a-gettin' along so slow, and so I stood up and gin a big push, and one foot slipped, an' over she went."

"And in you went!" said Harry.

"Yes—in I went. I don't see what ever put John Walker up to makin' sich a boat as that. It's jist the meanest, lopsidedest, low-borndedst boat I ever did see."

"I don't wonder you think so," said Harry, laughing; "but if I were you, I'd go home as soon as I could, and get some dry clothes."

"That's so," said Tony, rising; "these feel like the inside of an eelskin."

"Oh, Tony!" said Harry, as they walked

along up the creek, "did you find out what that thing was?"

"Yes, I did," answered Tony.

"And what was it?"

"It was Captain Caseby."

"Captain Caseby?" cried Harry.

"Yes; jist him, and nuthin' else. It was his head we seen agin the sky, as he was a-walkin' on the other side of that little ridge."

"Captain Caseby!" again ejaculated Harry in his amazement.

"Yes, sir!" said Tony; "an' I'm glad I found it out before I crossed the creek, for my gun wasn't no further use, an' it was only in my way, so I left it in the bushes up here. Ef it hadn't been for that, the ole rifle would ha' been at the bottom of the creek."

"But what was Captain Caseby doing here in the woods at night?" asked Harry.

"Dunno," said Tony; "I jist follered him till I made sure he wasn't a-huntin' for my turkey-blind, and then I let him go 'long. His business wasn't no consarn o' mine."

When Tony and Harry had nearly reached the village, who should they meet, at a cross-

road in the woods, but Mr. Loudon and Captain Caseby!

"Ho, ho!" cried the captain, "where on earth have you been? Here I've been a-hunting you all night."

"You have, have you?" said Tony, with a chuckle; "and Harry and I've been a-huntin' you all night, too."

Everybody now began to talk at once. Harry's father was so delighted to find his boy again, that he did not care to explain anything, and he and Harry walked off together.

But Captain Caseby told Tony all about it. How he, Mr. Loudon, and old Mr. Wagner, had set out to look for Harry; how Mr. Wagner soon became so tired that he had to give up, and go home, and how Mr. Loudon had gone through the woods to the north, while he kept down by the creek, searching on both sides of the stream, and how they had both walked, and walked, and walked all night, and had met at last down by the river.

"How did you manage to meet Mr. Loudon?" asked Tony.

"I heard him hollerin'," said the captain.

"He hollered pretty near all night, he told me."

"Why didn't you holler?" Tony asked.

"Oh, I never exercise my voice in the night air," said the captain. "It's against my rules."

"Well, you'd better break your rules next time you go out in the woods where Harry is," said the turkey-hunter, "or he'll pop you over for a turkey or a musk-rat. He's a sharp shot, I kin tell ye."

"You don't really mean he was after me last night with a gun!" exclaimed Captain Caseby.

"He truly was," declared Tony; "he was a-trackin' you his Sunday best. It was bad for you that it was so dark that he couldn't see what you was; but it might have been worse for ye if it hadn't been so dark that he couldn't find ye at all."

"I'm glad I didn't know it," said the captain earnestly; "thoroughly and completely glad I didn't know it. I should have yelled all the skin off my throat, if I'd have known he was after me with a gun."

After Harry had been home an hour or two, and Kate had somewhat recovered from her

transports of joy, and everybody in the village had heard all about everything that had happened, and Captain Caseby had declared, in the bosom of his family, that he'd never go out into the woods again at night without keeping up a steady "holler," Harry remembered that he had left his sumac-bag somewhere in the woods. Hard work for a whole day and a night, and nothing to show for it! Rather a poor prospect for Aunt Matilda.

CHAPTER VII.

AUNT MATILDA'S CHRISTMAS.

WHEN Harry and Kate held council that afternoon, their affairs looked a little discouraging. Kate's sumac was weighed, and it was only seven pounds! Seven whole cents, if they took it out in trade, or five and a quarter cents, as Kate calculated, if they took cash. A woman as large as Aunt Matilda could not be supported on that kind of an income, it was plain enough.

But our brave boy and girl were not discouraged. Harry went after his bag the next day, and found it with about ten pounds of leaves in it. Then, for a week or two, he and his sister worked hard and sometimes gathered as much as twenty-five pounds of leaves in a day. But they had their bad days, when there was a great deal of walking and very little picking.

And then, in due course of time, school began

and the sumac season was at an end, for the leaves are not merchantable after they begin to turn red, although they are then a great deal prettier to look at.

But then Harry went out early in the morning, and on Saturdays, and shot hares and partridges, and Kate began to sell her chickens, of which she had twenty-seven (eighteen died natural deaths, or were killed by weasels during the summer), they found that they made more money than they could have made by sumac gathering.

"It's a good deal for you two to do for that old woman," said Captain Caseby, one day.

"But, didn't we promise to do it?" said Miss Kate, bravely. "We'd do twice as much, if there were two of her."

It was very fortunate, however, that there were not two of her.

Sometimes they had extraordinary luck. Early one November morning Harry was out in the woods and caught sight of a fat wild-turkey.

Bang!—one dollar.

That was enough to keep Aunt Matilda for a week.

At least it ought to have kept her. But there was something wrong somewhere. Every week it cost more and more to keep the old colored woman in what Harry called "eating material."

"Her appetite must be increasing," said Harry; "she's eaten two pecks of meal this week."

"I don't believe it," said Kate; "she couldn't do it. I believe she has company."

And this turned out to be true.

On inquiry they found that Uncle Braddock was in the habit of taking his meals with Aunt Matilda, sometimes three times a day. Now, Uncle Braddock had a home of his own, where he could get his meals if he chose to go after them, and Harry remonstrated with him on his conduct.

"Why, ye see, Mah'sr Harry," said the old man, "she's so dreffful lonesome down dar all by sheself, and sometimes it's a-rainin' an' a long way fur me to go home and git me wrapper all wet jist fur one little meal o' wittles. And when I see what you all is a-doin' fur her, I feels dat I oughter try and do somethin' fur her, too, as

long as I kin; an' I can't expect to go about much longer, Mah'sr Harry; de ole wrapper's pretty nigh gin out."

"I don't mind your taking your meals there, now and then," said Harry; "but I don't want you to live there. We can't afford it."

"All right, Mah'sr Harry," said Uncle Braddock, and after that he never came to Aunt Matilda's to meals more than five or six times a week.

And now Christmas, always a great holiday with the negroes of the South, was approaching, and Harry and Kate determined to try and give Aunt Matilda extra good living during Christmas week, and to let her have company every day if she wanted it.

Harry had a pig. He got it in the spring when it was very small, and when its little tail was scarcely long enough to curl. There was a story about his getting this pig.

He and some other boys had been out walking, and several dogs went along with them. The dogs chased a cat—a beautiful, smooth cat, that belonged to old Mr. Truly Matthews. The cat put off at the top of her speed, which was a

good deal better than any speed the dogs could show, and darted up a tree right in front of her master's house. The dogs surrounded the tree and barked as if they expected to bark the tree down. One little fuzzy dog, with short legs and hair all over his eyes, actually jumped into a low crotch, and the boys thought he was going to try to climb the tree. If he had ever reached the cat he would have been very sorry he hadn't stayed at home, for she was a good deal bigger than he was. Harry and his friends endeavored to drive the dogs away from the tree, but it was of no use. Even kicks and blows only made them bark the more. Directly out rushed Mr. Truly Matthews, as angry as he could be. He shouted and scolded at the boys for setting their dogs on his cat, and then he kicked the dogs out of his yard in less time than you could count seventy-two. He was very angry, indeed, and talked about the shocking conduct of the boys to everybody in the village. He would listen to no explanations or excuses.

Harry was extremely sorry that Mr. Matthews was so incensed against him, especially as he knew there was no cause for it, and he was

talking about it to Kate one day, when she exclaimed:

"I'll tell you what will be sure to pacify Mr. Mr. Matthews, Harry. He has a lot of little pigs that he wants to sell. Just you go and buy one of them, and see if he isn't as good-natured as ever, when he sees your money."

Harry took the advice. He had a couple of dollars, and with them he bought a little pig, the smallest of the lot; and Mr. Matthews, who was very much afraid he could not find purchasers for all his pigs, was as completely pacified as Kate thought he would be.

Harry took his property home, and all through the summer and fall the little pig ran about the yard and the fields and the woods, and ate acorns—and sweet potatoes and turnips when he could get a chance to root them up with his funny little twitchy nose—and grunted and slept in the sun; and about the middle of December he had grown so big that Harry sold him for eleven dollars. Here was quite a capital for Christmas.

"I can't afford to spend it all on Aunt Matilda," said Harry to his mother and Kate,

" for I have other things to do with my money. But she's bound to have a good Christmas, and we'll make her a present besides."

Kate was delighted with his idea, and immediately began to suggest all sorts of things for the present. If Harry chose to buy anything that she could " make up," she would go right to work at it. But Harry could not think of anything that would suit exactly, and neither could Kate, nor their mother; and when Mr. Loudon was taken into council, at dinner-time, he could suggest nothing but an army blanket —which suggestion met with no favor at all.

At last Mr. Loudon advised that they should ask Aunt Matilda what she would like to have for a present.

" There's no better way of suiting her than that," said he.

So Harry and Kate went down to the old woman's cabin that afternoon, after school, and asked her.

Aunt Matilda didn't hesitate an instant.

" Ef you chil'en is really a-goin' to give me a present, there ain't nothin' I'd rather have than a Chrismis tree."

"A Christmas tree!" cried Harry and Kate, both bursting out laughing.

"Yes, indeed, chil'en. Ef ye give me anything, give me a good big fiery Chrismis tree like you all had, year 'fore las'."

Two years before, Harry and Kate had had their last Christmas tree. There were no younger children, and these two were now considered to have outgrown that method of celebrating Christmas. But they had missed their tree last year—missed it very much.

And now Aunt Matilda wanted one. It was the very thing!

"Hurrah!" cried Harry; "you shall have it. Hurrah for Aunt Matilda's Christmas tree!"

"Hurrah!" cried Kate; "won't it be splendid? Hurrah!"

"Hurrah!" said Uncle Braddock, who was just coming up to the cabin door, but he did not shout very loud, and nobody heard him.

"Hurrah! I wonder what dey's all hurrahin' about?" he said to himself.

Harry and Kate had started off to run home with the news, but Aunt Matilda told the old man all about it, and when he heard there was

to be a Christmas tree, he was just as glad as anybody.

When it became generally known that Aunt Matilda was to have a Christmas tree, the people of the neighborhood took a great interest in the matter. John Walker and Dick Ford, two colored men of the vicinity, volunteered to get the tree. But when they went out into the woods to cut it, eighteen other colored people, big and little, followed them, some to help and some to give advice.

A very fine tree was selected. It was a pine, ten feet high, and when they brought it into Aunt Matilda's cabin, they could not stand it upright, for her ceiling was rather low.

When Harry and Kate came home from school they were rather surprised to see so big a tree, but it was such a fine one that they thought they must have it. After some consideration it was determined to erect it in a deserted cabin, near by, which had no upper floor, and was high enough to allow the tree to stand up satisfactorily. This was, indeed, an excellent arrangement, for it was better to keep the decoration of the Christmas tree a secret from Aunt Matilda until all was completed.

The next day was a holiday, and Harry and Kate went earnestly to work. A hole was dug in the clay floor of the old cabin, and the tree planted firmly therein. It was very firm, indeed, for a little colored boy named Josephine's Bobby climbed nearly to the topmost branch, without shaking it very much. For four or five days the work of decorating the tree went on. Everybody talked about it, a great many laughed at it, and nearly everybody seemed inclined to give something to hang upon its branches. Kate brought a large box containing the decorations of her last Christmas tree, and she and Harry hung sparkling balls, and golden stars, and silver fishes, and red and blue paper angels, and candy swans, and sugar pears, and glittering things of all sorts, shapes, and sizes upon the boughs. Harry had a step-ladder, and Dick Ford and five colored boys held it firmly while he stood on it and tied on the ornaments. Very soon the neighbors began to send in their contributions. Mrs. Loudon gave a stout woollen dress, which was draped over a lower branch; while Mr. Loudon, who was not to be diverted from his original idea, sent an army blanket, which Kate

arranged around the root of the tree, so as to look as much as possible like gray moss. Mr. Darby, who kept the store, sent a large paper bag of sugar and a small bag of tea, which were carefully hung on lower branches. Miss Jane Davis thought she ought to do something, and she contributed a peck of sweet potatoes, which, each tied to a string, were soon dangling from the branches. Then Mr. Truly Matthews, who did not wish to be behind his neighbors in generosity, sent a shoulder of bacon, which looked quite magnificent as it hung about the middle of the tree. Other people sent bars of soap, bags of meal, packages of smoking-tobacco, and flannel petticoats. A pair of shoes was contributed, and several pairs of stockings, which latter were filled with apples and hickory-nuts by the considerate Kate. Several of the school children gave sticks of candy; and old Mrs. Sarah Page, who had nothing else to spare, brought a jug of molasses, which was suspended near the top of the tree. Kate did not fancy the appearance of the jug, and she wreathed it with strings of glittering glass balls; and the shoulder of bacon she stuck full of red berries and holly-leaves.

Harry contributed a bright red handkerchief for Aunt Matilda's head, and Kate gave a shawl which was yellower than a sunflower, if such a thing could be. And Harry bore the general expenses of the "extras," which were not trifling.

When Christmas eve arrived everybody came to see Aunt Matilda's Christmas tree. Kate and Harry were inside superintending the final arrangements, and about fifty or sixty persons, colored and white, were gathered around the closed door of the old cabin. When all was ready Aunt Matilda made her appearance, supported on either side by Dick Ford and John Walker, while Uncle Braddock, in his many-colored dressing-gown, followed close behind. Then the door was opened, and Aunt Matilda entered, followed by as many of the crowd as could get in. It was certainly a scene of splendor. A wood fire blazed in the fire-place at one end of the cabin, while dozens of tallow candles lighted up the tree. The gold and silver stars glistened, the many-colored glass balls shone among the green pine boughs; the shoulder of bacon glowed like a bed of flowers, while the jug of molasses hung calm and serene, surrounded by

its glittering beads. A universal buzz of approbation and delight arose. No one had ever seen such a Christmas tree before. Every bough and every branch bore something useful as well as ornamental.

As for Aunt Matilda, for several moments she remained speechless with delight. At last she exclaimed:

"Laws-a-massey! It's wuth while being good for ninety-five years to git such a tree at las'."

CHAPTER VIII.

A Lively Team.

"I WANT you to understand, Harry," said Mr. Loudon, one day, "that I do not disapprove of what you and Kate are doing for old Aunt Matilda. On the contrary, I feel proud of you both. The idea was honorable to you, and, so far, you have done very well; better than I expected; and I believe I was a little more sanguine than any one else in the village. But you must not forget that you have something else to think of besides making money for Aunt Matilda."

"But, don't I think of other things, father?" said Harry. "I'm sure I get along well enough at school."

"That may be, my boy; but I want you to get along better than well enough."

This little conversation made quite an impression on Harry, and he talked to Kate about it.

"I suppose father's right," said she; "but what's to be done about it? Is that poor old woman to have only half enough to eat, so that you may read twice as much Virgil?"

Harry laughed.

"But perhaps she will have five-eighths of enough to eat if I only read nine-sixteenths as much Latin," said he.

"Oh! you're always poking arithmetic fun at me," said Kate. "But I tell you what you can do," she continued. "You can get up half an hour earlier, every morning, and that will give you a good deal of extra time to think about your lessons."

"I can *think* about them in bed," said Harry.

"Humph!" said Kate; and she went on with her work. She was knitting a "tidy," worth two pounds of sugar, or half a pound of tea, when it should be finished.

Harry did not get up any earlier; for, as he expressed it, "It was dreadfully cold before breakfast," on those January mornings; but his father and mother noticed that the subject of Aunt Matilda's maintenance did not so entirely

engross the conversation of the brother and sister in the evenings; and they had their heads together almost as often over slate and school-books as over the little account-book in which Kate put down receipts and expenditures.

On a Thursday night, about the middle of January, there was a fall of snow. Not a very heavy fall; the snow might have been deeper, but it was deep enough for sledding. On the Friday, Harry, in connection with another boy, Tom Selden, several years older than himself, concocted a grand scheme. They would haul wood, on a sled, all day Saturday.

It was not to be any trifling little "boy-play" wood-hauling. Harry's father owned a wood-sled—one of the very few sleds or sleighs in the county—which was quite an imposing affair, as to size, at least. It was about eight feet long and four feet wide; and although it was rough enough,—being made of heavy boards, nailed transversely upon a couple of solid runners, with upright poles to keep the load in its place—it was a very good sled, as far as it went, which had not been very far of late; for there had been no good sledding for several seasons. Old

Mr. Truly Matthews had a large pile of wood cut in a forest about a mile and a half from the village, and the boys knew that he wanted it hauled to the house, and that, by a good day's work, considerable money could be made.

All the arrangements were concluded on Friday, which was a half-holiday, on account of the snow making travelling unpleasant for those scholars who lived at a distance. Harry's father gave his consent to the plan, and loaned his sled. Three negro men agreed to help for one-fourth of the profits. Tom Selden went into the affair, heart and hand, agreeing to take his share out in fun. What money was made, after paying expenses, was to go into the Aunt Matilda Fund, which was tolerably low about that time.

Kate gave her earnest sanction to the scheme, which was quite disinterested on her part, for, being a girl, she could not very well go on a wood-hauling expedition, and she could expect to do little else but stay at home and calculate the probable profits of the trips.

The only difficulty was to procure a team; and nothing less than a four-horse team would satisfy the boys.

Mr. Loudon lent one horse, old Selim, a big brown fellow, who was very good at pulling when he felt in the humor. Tom could bring no horse; for his father did not care to lend his horses for such a purpose. He was afraid they might get their legs broken; and, strange as it seemed to the boys, most of the neighbors appeared to have similar notions. Horses were very hard to borrow that Friday afternoon. But a negro man, named Isaac Waddell, agreed to hire his thin horse Hector, for fifty cents for the day; and the store-keeper, after much persuasion, lent a big gray mule, Grits by name. There was another mule in the village, which the boys could have if they wanted her; but they didn't want her—that is, if they could get anything else with four legs that would do to go in their team. This was Polly, a little mule, belonging to Mrs. Dabney, who kept the post-office. Polly was not only very little in size, but she was also very little given to going. She did not particularly object to a walk, if it were not too long, and would pull a buggy or carry a man with great complacency, but she seldom indulged in trotting. It was of no use to whip

her. Her skin was so thick, or so destitute of feeling, that she did not seem to take any notice of a good hard crack. Polly was not a favorite, but she doubtless had her merits, although no one knew exactly what they were. Perhaps the best thing that could be said about her was, that she did not take up much room.

But, on Saturday, it was evident that Polly would have to be taken, for no animal could be obtained in her place.

So, soon after breakfast, the team was collected in Mr. Loudon's back-yard, and harnessed to the sled. Besides the three negroes who had been hired, there were seven volunteers—some big and some little—who were very willing to work for nothing, if they might have a ride on the sled. The harness was not the best in the world; some of it was leather, and some was rope and some was chain. It was gathered together from various quarters, like the team—nobody seemed anxious to lend good harness.

Grits and thin Hector were the leaders, and Polly and old Selim were the pole-horses, so to speak.

When all the straps were buckled, and the

chains hooked, and the knots tied (and this took a good while, as there were only twelve men and boys to do it), Dick Ford jumped on old Selim, little Johnny Sand, as black as ink, was hoisted on Grits, and Gregory Montague, a tall yellow boy, with high boots and no toes to them, bestrode thin Hector. Harry, Tom, and nine negroes (two more had just come into the yard) jumped on the sled. Dick Ford cracked his whip; Kate stood on the back-door step and clapped her hands; all the darkies shouted; Tom and Harry hurrahed; and away they didn't go.

Polly wasn't ready.

And what was more, old brown Selim was perfectly willing to wait for her. He looked around mildly at the little mule, as if he would say: "Now, don't be in a hurry, my good Polly. Be sure you're right before you go ahead."

Polly was quite sure she wasn't right, and stood as stiffly as if she had been frozen to the ground, and all the cracking of whips and shouting of "Git up!" "Go 'long!" "What do you mean, dar? you Polly!" made no impression on her.

Then Harry made his voice heard above the hubhub.

"Never mind Polly!" he shouted. "Let her alone. Dick, and you other fellows, just start off your own horses. Now, then! Get up, all of you!"

"At this, every rider whipped up his horse or his mule, and spurred him with his heels, and every darkey shouted, "Hi, dar!" and off they went, rattledy-bang!

Polly went, too. There was never such an astonished little mule in this world! Out of the gate they all whirled at full gallop, and up the road, tearing along. Negroes shouting, chains rattling, snow flying back from sixteen pounding hoofs, sled cutting through the snow like a ship at sea, and a little darkey shooting out behind at every bounce over a rough place!

"Hurrah!" cried Harry, holding tight to an upright pole. "Isn't this splendid!"

"Splendid! It's glorious!" shouted Tom. "It's better than being a pi—" And down he went on his knees, as the big sled banged over a stone in the road, and Josephine's Bobby was bounced out into a snow-drift under a fence.

Whether Tom intended to say a pirate or a pyrotechnic, was never discovered; but, in six minutes, there was only one of the small darkies left on the sled. The men, and this one, John William Webster, hung on to the poles as if they were glued there.

As for Polly, she was carried along faster than she ever went before in her life. She jumped, she skipped, she galloped, she slid, she skated; sometimes sitting down, and sometimes on her feet, but flying along, all the same, no matter how she chose to go.

And so, rattling, shouting, banging, bouncing; snow flying and whips cracking, on they sped, until John William Webster's pole came out, and clip! he went heels over head into the snow.

But John William had a soul above tumbles. In an instant he jerked himself up to his feet, dropped the pole, and dashed after the sled.

Swiftly onward went the sled and right behind came John William, his legs working like steamboat wheels, his white teeth shining, and his big eyes sparkling!

There was no stopping the sled; but there

was no stopping John William, either, and in less than two minutes he reached the sled, grabbed a man by the leg, and tugged and pulled until he seated himself on the end board.

"I tole yer so!" said he, when he got his breath. And yet he hadn't told anybody anything.

And now the woods were reached, and after a deal of pulling and shouting, the team was brought to a halt, and then slowly led through a short road to where the wood was piled.

The big mule and the horses steamed and puffed a little, but Polly stood as calm as a rocking-horse.

Notwithstanding the rapidity of the drive, it was late when the party reached the woods. The gathering together and harnessing of the team had taken much longer than they expected; and so the boys set to work with a will to load the sled; for they wanted to make two trips that morning. But although they all, black and white, worked hard, it was slow business. Some of the wood was cut and split properly, and some was not, and then the sled had to be

turned around, and there was but little room to do it in, and so a good deal of time was lost.

But at last the sled was loaded up, and they were nearly ready to start, when John William Webster, who had run out to the main road, set up a shout:

"Oh! Mah'sr Harry! Mah'sr Tom!"

Harry and Tom ran out to the road, and stood there petrified with astonishment.

Where was the snow?

It was all gone, excepting a little here and there in the shade of the fence corners. The day had turned out to be quite mild, and the sun, which was now nearly at its noon height, had melted it all away.

Here was a most unlooked-for state of affairs! What was to be done? The boys ran back to the sled, and the colored men ran out to the road, and everybody talked and nobody seemed to say anything of use.

At last Dick Ford spoke up:

"I tell ye what, Mah'sr Harry! I say, just let's go 'long," said he.

"But how are you going to do it?" said Harry. "There's no snow."

"I know that; but de mud's jist as slippery as grease. That thar team kin pull it, easy 'nuff!"

Marry and Tom consulted together, and agreed to drive out to the road and try what could be done, and then, if the loaded sled was too much for the team, they would throw off the wood and go home with the empty sled.

There was snow enough until they reached the road—for very little had melted in the woods—and when they got fairly out on the main road the team did not seem to mind the change from snow to thin mud.

The load was not a very heavy one, and there were two horses and two mules—a pretty strong team.

Polly did very well. She was now harnessed with Grits in the lead; and she pulled along bravely. But it was slow work, compared to the lively ride over the snow. The boys and the men trudged through the mud, by the side of the sled, and, looking at it in the best possible light, it was a very dull way to haul wood. The boys agreed that after this trip they would be very careful not to go on another mud-sledding expedition.

But soon they came to a long hill, and, going down this, the team began to trot, and Harry and Tom and one or two of the men jumped on the edges of the sled, outside of the load, holding on to the poles. Then Grits, the big mule, began to run, and Gregory couldn't hold him in, and old Selim and thin Hector and little Polly all struck out on a gallop, and away they went, bumping and thumping down the hill.

And then stick after stick, two sticks, six sticks, a dozen sticks at a time, slipped out behind.

It was of no use to catch at them to hold them on. They were not fastened down in any way, and Harry and Tom and the men on the sled had as much as they could do to hold themselves on.

When they reached the bottom of the hill the pulling became harder; but Grits had no idea of stopping for that. He was bound for home. And so he plunged on at the top of his speed. But the rest of the team did not fancy going so fast on level ground, and they slackened their pace.

This did not suit Grits. He gave one tre-

mendous bound, burst loose from his harness, and dashed ahead. Up went his hind legs in the air; off shot Gregory Montague into the mud, and then away went Grits, clipperty-clap! home to his stable.

When Harry and Tom, the two horses, the little mule, the eight colored men, the sled, John William Webster and eleven logs of wood reached the village it was considerably after dinner-time.

When the horse-hire was paid, and something was expended for mending borrowed harness, and the negroes had received a little present for their labor, the Aunt Matilda Fund was diminished by the sum of three dollars and eighty cents.

Mr. Truly Matthews agreed to say nothing about the loss of his wood that was scattered along the road.

CHAPTER IX.

Business in Earnest.

ALTHOUGH Harry did not find his wood-hauling speculation very profitable, it was really of advantage to him, for it gave him an idea.

And his idea was a very good one. He saw clearly enough that money could be made by hauling wood, and he was also quite certain that it would never do for him to take his time, especially during school term, for that purpose. So, after consultation with his father, and after a great deal of figuring by Kate, he determined to go into the business in a regular way.

About five miles from the village was a railroad station, and it was also a wood station. Here the railroad company paid two dollars a cord for wood delivered on their grounds.

Two miles from the station, on the other side of Crooked Creek, Harry's father owned a large

tract of forest land, and here Harry received permission to cut and take away all the wood that he wanted. Mr. Loudon was perfectly willing, in this way, to help his children in their good work.

So Harry made arrangements with Dick Ford and John Walker, who were not regularly hired to any one that winter, to cut and haul his wood for him, on shares. John Walker had a wagon, which was merely a set of wheels, with a board floor laid on the axletrees, and the use of this he contributed in consideration of a little larger share in the profits. Harry hired Grits and another mule at a low rate, as there was not much for mules to do at that time of the year.

The men were to cut up and deliver the wood and get receipts for it from the station-master; and it was to be Harry's business to collect the money at stated times, and divide the proceeds according to the rate agreed upon. Harry and his father made the necessary arrangements with the station-master, and thus all the preliminaries were settled quite satisfactorily.

In a few days the negroes were at work, and

as they both lived but a short distance from the creek, on the village side, it was quite convenient for them. John Walker had a stable in which to keep the mules, and the cost of their feed was also to be added to his share of the profits.

In a short time Harry had quite a number of applications from negroes who wished to cut wood for him, but he declined to hire any additional force until he saw how his speculation would turn out.

Old Uncle Braddock pleaded hard to be employed. He could not cut wood, nor could he drive a team, but he was sure he could be of great use as overseer.

"You see, Mah'sr Harry," he said, "I lib right on de outside edge ob you' pa's woods, and I kin go ober dar jist as easy as nuffin, early every mornin', and see dat dem boys does dere work, and don't chop down de wrong trees. Mind now, I tell ye, you all will make a pile o' money ef ye jist hire me to obersee dem boys."

For some time Harry resisted his entreaties, but at last, principally on account of Kate's argument that the old man ought to be encouraged

in making something toward his living, if he were able and willing to do so, Harry hired him on his own terms, which were ten cents a day.

About four o'clock every afternoon during his engagement, Uncle Braddock made his appearance in the village, to demand his ten cents. When Harry remonstrated with him on his quitting work so early, he said:

"Why, you see, Mah'sr Harry, it's a long way from dem woods here, and I got to go all de way back home agin; and it gits dark mighty early dese short days."

In about a week the old man came to Harry and declared that he must throw up his engagement.

"What's the matter?" asked Harry.

"I'm gwine to gib up dat job, Mah'sr Harry."

"But why? You wanted it bad enough," said Harry.

"But I'm gwine to gib it up now," said the old man.

"Well, I want you to tell me your reasons for giving it up," persisted Harry.

Uncle Braddock stood silent for a few minutes, and then he said:

"Well, Mah'sr Harry, dis is jist de truf; dem ar boys, dey ses to me dat ef I come foolin' around dere any more, dey'd jist chop me up, ole wrapper an' all, and haul me off fur kindlin' wood. Dey say I was dry enough. An' dey needn't a made sich a fuss about it, fur I didn't trouble 'em much; hardly eber went nigh 'em. Ten cents' worf o' oberseein' aint a-gwine to hurt nobody."

"Well, Uncle Braddock," said Harry, laughing, "I think you're wise to give it up."

"Dat's so," said the old negro, and away he trudged to Aunt Matilda's cabin, where, no doubt, he ate a very good ten cents' worth of corn-meal and bacon.

This wood enterprise of Harry's worked pretty well on the whole. Sometimes the men cut and hauled quite steadily, and sometimes they didn't. Once every two weeks Harry rode over to the station, and collected what was due him; and his share of the profits kept Aunt Matilda quite comfortably.

But, although Kate was debarred from any share in this business, she worked every day at her tidies for the store, and knit stockings, be-

sides, for some of the neighbors, who furnished the yarn and paid her a fair price. There were people who thought Mrs. Loudon did wrong in allowing her daughter to work for money in this way, but Kate's mother said that the end justified the work, and that so long as Kate persevered in her self-appointed tasks, she should not interfere.

As for Kate, she said she should work on, no matter how much money Harry made. There was no knowing what might happen.

But the most important of Kate's duties was the personal attention she paid to Aunt Matilda. She went over to the old woman's cabin every day or two, and saw that she was kept warm and had what she needed.

And these visits had a good influence on the old woman, for her cabin soon began to look much neater, now that a nice little girl came to see her so often.

When the spring came on, Aunt Matilda actually took it into her head to whitewash her cabin, a thing she had not done for years. She and Uncle Braddock worked at it by turns. The old woman was too stiff and rheumatic to

keep at such work long at a time; but she was very proud of her whitewashing; and when she was tired of working at the inside of her cabin, she used to go out and whitewash the trunks of the trees around the house. She had seen trees thus ornamented, and she thought they were perfectly beautiful.

Kate was violently opposed to anything of this kind, and, at last, told Aunt Matilda that if she persisted in surrounding her house with what looked like a forest of tombstones, she, Kate, would have to stop coming there.

So Aunt Matilda, in a manner, desisted.

But one day she noticed a little birch-tree, some distance from the house, and the inclination to whitewash that little birch was too strong to be resisted.

"He's so near white, anyway," she said to herself, "dat it's a pity not to finish him."

So off she hobbled with a tin cup full of whitewash and a small brush to adorn the little birch-tree, leaving her cabin in the charge of Holly Thomas.

Holly, whose whole name was Hollywood Cemetery Thomas, was a little black girl, be-

tween two and five years old. Sometimes she seemed nearly five, and sometimes not more than two. Her parents intended christening her Minerva, but hearing the name of the well-known Hollywood Cemetery in Richmond, they thought it so pretty that they gave it to their little daughter, without the slightest idea, however, that it was the name of a grave-yard.

Holly had come over to pay a morning visit to Aunt Matilda, and she had brought her only child, a wooden doll, which she was trying to teach to walk, by dragging it head foremost by a long string tied around its neck.

"Now den, you Holly, you stay h'yar and mind de house while I's gone," said Aunt Matilda, as she departed.

"All yite," said the little darkey, and she sat down on the floor to prepare her child for a coat of whitewash; but she had not yet succeeded in convincing the doll of the importance of the operation when her attention was aroused by a dog just outside of the door.

It was Kate's little woolly white dog, Blinks, who often used to come to the cabin with her, and who sometimes, when he got a chance to

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run away, used to come alone, as he did this morning.

"Go 'way dar, litty dog," said Miss Holly; "yer can't come in; dere's nobody home. Yun 'long, now, d' yer y'ear!"

But Blinks either didn't hear or didn't care, for he stuck his head in at the door.

"Go 'way, dere!" shouted Holly. "Aunt Tillum ain't home. Go 'way now, and tum bat in half an hour. Aunt Tillum 'll be bat den. Don't yer hear now, go *'way!*

But, instead of going away, Blinks trotted in, as bold as a four-pound lion.

"Go 'way, go 'way!" screamed Holly, squeezing herself up against the wall in her terror, and then Blinks barked at her. He had never seen a little black girl behave so, in the whole course of his life, and it was quite right in him to bark and let her know what he thought of her conduct. Then Holly, in her fright, dropped her doll, and when Blinks approached to examine it, she screamed louder and louder, and Blinks barked more and more, and there was quite a hubbub. In the midst of it a man put his head in at the door of the cabin.

He was a tall man, with red hair, and a red freckled face, and a red bristling moustache, and big red hands.

"What's all this noise about?" said he; and when he saw what it was, he came in.

"Get out of this, you little beast!" said he to Blinks, and putting the toe of his boot under the little dog, he kicked him clear out of the door of the cabin. Then turning to Holly, he looked at her pretty much as if he intended to kick her out too. But he didn't. He put out one of his big red hands and said to her:

"Shake hands."

Holly obeyed without a word, and then snatching her wooden child from the floor, she darted out of the door and reached the village almost as soon as poor Blinks.

In a minute or two Aunt Matilda made her appearance at the door. She had heard the barking and the screaming, and had come to see what was the matter.

When she saw the man, she exclaimed:

"Why, Mah'sr George! Is dat you?"

"Yes, it's me," said the man. "Shake hands, Aunt Matilda."

"I thought you was down in Mississippi, Mah'sr George," said the old woman; "and I thought you was gwine to stay dar."

"Couldn't do it," said the man. "It didn't suit me, down there. Five years of it was enough for me."

"Enough fur dem, too, p'r'aps!" said Aunt Matilda, with a grim chuckle.

The man took no notice of her remark, but said:

"I didn't intend to stop here, but I heard such a barking and screaming in your cabin, that I turned out of my way to see what the row was about. I've just come up from the railroad. Does old Michaels keep store here yet?"

"No, he don't," said Aunt Matilda; "he's dead. Mah'sr Darby keeps dar now."

"Is that so?" cried the man. "Why, it was on old Michaels's account that I was sneakin' around the village. Why, I'm mighty glad I stopped here. It makes things different if old Michaels isn't about."

"Well, ye might as well go 'long," said Aunt Matilda, who seemed to be getting into a bad humor. "There's others who knows jist as

much about yer bad doin's as Mah'sr Michaels did."

"I suppose you mean that meddling humbug, John Loudon," said the man.

"Now, look h'yar, you George Mason?" cried Aunt Matilda, making one long step toward the whitewash bucket; "jist you git out o' dat dar door!" and she seized the whitewash brush and gave it a terrific swash in the bucket.

The man looked at her—he knew her of old—and then he left the cabin almost as quickly as Blinks and Holly went out of it.

"Ef it hadn't been fur dat little dog," said Aunt Matilda, grumly, "he'd a gone on. Them little dogs is always a-doin' mischief."

CHAPTER X.

A Meeting on the Road.

SOME weeks before the little affair between Blinks and Holly, related in our last chapter, Harry and Kate took a ride over to the railroad station.

During the winter Harry had frequently gone over on horseback to attend to the payments for his wood; and now that the roads were in fit condition for carriage travel, he was glad to have an opportunity to take the buggy and give Kate a ride.

For some days previously, Crooked Creek had been "up;" that is, the spring rains had caused it to overflow, and all travel across it had been suspended. The bridges on such occasions —and Crooked Creek had a bad habit of being "up" several times in the course of a year— —were covered, and the lowlands were under water for a considerable distance on each side

of the stream. There were so few boats on the creek, and the current, in time of freshets, was so strong, that ferriage was seldom thought of. In consequence of this state of affairs Harry had not heard from his wood-cutters for more than a week, as they had not been able to cross the creek to their homes. It was, therefore, as much to see how they were getting along as to attend to financial matters that he took this trip.

It was a fine, bright day in very early spring, and old Selim trotted on quite gayly. Before very long they overtook Miles Jackson, jogging along on a little bay horse.

Miles was a black man, very sober and sedate, who for years had carried the mail twice a week from a station farther up the railroad to the village. But he was not a mail-carrier now. His employer, a white man, who had the contract for carrying the mails, had also gone into another business which involved letter-carrying.

A few miles back from the village of Akeville, where the Loudons lived, was a mica mine, which had recently been bought, and was now worked by a company from the North. This mica (the semi-transparent substance that is set

into stove doors) proved to be very plentiful and valuable, and the company had a great deal of business on their hands. It was frequently necessary to send messages and letters to the North, and these were always carried over to the station on the other side of Crooked Creek, where there was a daily mail and a telegraph office. The contract to carry these letters and messages to and from the mines had been given to Miles's employer, and the steady negro man had been taken off the mail-route to attend to this new business.

"Well, Miles," said Harry, as he overtook him. "How do you like riding on this road?"

"How d' y', Mah'sr Harry? How d' y', Miss Kate?" said the colored man, touching his hat and riding up on the side of the road to let them pass. "I do' know how I likes it yit, Mah'sr Harry. Don't seem 'xactly nat'ral after ridin' de oder road so long!"

"You have a pretty big letter-bag there," said Harry.

"Dat's so," said Miles; "but 'taint dis big ebery day. Sence de creek's been up I haint

been able to git across, and dere's piles o' letters to go ober to-day."

"It must make it rather bad for the company when the creek rises in this way," said Harry.

"Dat's so," answered Miles. "Dey gits in a heap o' trubble when dey can't send dere letters and git 'em. Though 'taint so many letters dey sends as telegraphs."

"It's a pity they couldn't have had their mine on the other side," remarked Kate.

"Dat's so, Miss Kate," said Miles, gravely. "I reckon dey didn't know about de creek's gittin' up so often, or dey'd dug dere mine on de oder side."

Harry and Kate laughed and drove on.

They soon reached Mr. Loudon's woods, but found no wood-cutters.

When they arrived at the station they saw Dick Ford and John Walker on the store-porch.

Harry soon discovered that no wood had been cut for several days, because the creek was up.

"What had that to do with it?" asked Harry.

"Why, you see, Mah'sr Harry," said John Walker, "de creek was mighty high, and dere was no knowin' how things ud turn out. So we thought we'd jist wait and see."

"So you've been here all the time?"

"Yes, sir; been h'yar all de time. Couldn't go home, you know."

Harry was very sorry to hear of this lost time, for he knew that his wood-cutting would come to an end as soon as the season was sufficiently advanced to give the men an opportunity of hiring themselves for farm-work; but it was of no use to talk any more about it; and so, after depositing Kate at the post-office, where the post-mistress, who knew her well, gave her a nice little "snack" of buttermilk, cold fried chicken, and "light-bread," he went to the station and transacted his business. He had not been there for some weeks, and he found quite a satisfactory sum of money due him, in spite of the holiday his men had taken. He then arranged with Dick and John to work on for a week or two longer—if "nothing happened;"

and after attending to some commissions for the family, he and Kate set out for home.

But nothing they had done that day was of so much importance as their meeting with Miles turned out to be.

CHAPTER XI.

ROB.

BLINKS was not the only dog on the Loudon place. There was another one, a much larger fellow, named Rob.

Rob was a big puppy, in the first place, and then he grew up to be a tall, long-legged dog, who was not only very fond of Harry and Kate, but of almost everybody else. In time he filled out and became rather more shapely, but he was always an ungainly dog—"too big for his size," as Harry put it.

It was supposed that Rob was partly bloodhound, but how much of him was bloodhound it would have been very difficult so say. Kate thought it was only his ears. They resembled the ears of a picture of a beautiful African bloodhound that she had in a book. At all events Rob showed no signs of any fighting ancestry. He was as gentle as a calf. Even Blinks was a bet-

ter watch-dog. But then, Rob was only a year old, and he might improve in time.

But, in spite of his general inutility, Rob was a capital companion on a country ramble.

And so it happened, one bright day toward the close of April, that he and Harry and Kate went out together into the woods, beyond Aunt Matilda's cabin. Kate's objects in taking the walk were wild flowers and general spring investigations into the condition of the woods; but Harry had an eye to business, although to hear him talk you would have supposed that he thought as much about ferns and flowers as Kate did.

Harry had an idea that it might possibly be a good thing to hire negroes that year to pick sumac for him. He was not certain that he could make it pay, but it was on his mind to such a degree that he took a great interest in the sumac-bushes, and hunted about the edges of the woods, where the bushes were generally found, to see what was the prospect for a large crop of leaves that year.

They were in the woods, about a mile from Aunt Matilda's cabin, and not very far from a

road, when they separated for a short time. Harry went on ahead, continuing his investigations, while Kate remained in a little open glade, where she found some flowers that she determined to dig up by the roots and transplant into her garden at home.

While she was at work she heard a heavy step behind her, and looking up, she saw a tall man standing by her. He had red hair, a red face, a red bristling moustache, and big red hands.

"How d'ye do?" said the man.

Kate stood up, with the plants, which she had just succeeded in getting out of the ground, in her apron.

"Good morning, sir," said she.

The man looked at her from head to foot, and then he said, "Shake hands!" holding out his big red hand.

But Kate did not offer to take it.

"Didn't you hear me?" said he. "I said, 'Shake hands.'"

"I heard you," said Kate.

"Well, why don't you do it, then?"

Kate did not answer, and the man repeated his question.

"Well, then, if I must tell you," said she; "in the first place, I don't know you; and, then, I'd rather not shake hands with you, anyway, because your hands are so dirty."

This might not have been very polite in Kate, but she was a straightforward girl, and the man's hands were very dirty indeed, although water was to be had in such abundance.

"What's your name?" said the man, with his face considerably redder than before.

"Kate Loudon," said the girl.

"Oh, ho! Loudon, is it? Well, Kate Loudon, if my hand's too dirty to shake, you'll find it isn't too dirty to box your ears."

Kate turned pale and shrank back against a tree. She gave a hurried glance into the woods, and then she called out, as loudly as she could: "*Harry!*"

The man, who had made a step toward her, now stopped and looked around, as if he would like to know who Harry was, before going any further.

Just then, Harry, who had heard Kate's call, came running up.

When the man saw him he seemed relieved, and a curious smile stretched itself beneath his bristling red moustache.

"What's the matter?" cried Harry.

"Oh, Harry!" Kate exclaimed, as she ran to him.

"Matter?" said the man. "The matter's this: I'm going to box her ears."

"Whose ears?"

"That girl's," replied the red-faced man, moving toward Kate.

"My sister! Not much!"

And Harry stepped between Kate and the man.

The man stood and looked at him, and he looked very angrily, too.

But Harry stood bravely before his sister. His face was flushed and his breath came quickly, though he was not frightened, not a whit!

And yet there was absolutely nothing that he could do. He had not his gun with him; he had not even a stick in his hand, and a stick would have been of little use against such a

strong man as that, who could have taken Harry in his big red hands and have thrown him over the highest fence in the county.

But for all that, the boy stood boldly up before his sister.

The man looked at him without a word, and then he stepped aside toward a small dogwood-bush.

For an instant, Harry thought that they might run away; but it was only for an instant. That long-legged man could catch them before they had gone a dozen yards—at least he could catch Kate.

The man took out a knife and cut a long and tolerably thick switch from the bush. Then he cut off the smaller end and began to trim away the twigs and leaves.

While doing this he looked at Harry, and said:

"I think I'll take you first."

Kate's heart almost stopped beating when she heard this, and Harry turned pale; but still the brave boy stood before his sister as stoutly as ever.

Kate tried to call for help, but she had no

voice. What could *she* do? A boxing on the ears was nothing, she now thought; she wished she had not called out, for it was evident that Harry was going to get a terrible whipping.

She could not bear it! Her dear brother!

She trembled so much that she could not stand, and she sank down on her knees. Rob, the dog, who had been lying near by, snapping at flies, all this time, now came up to comfort her.

"Oh, Rob!" she whispered, "I wish you were a cross dog."

And Rob wagged his tail and lay down by her.

"I wonder," she thought to herself, "oh! I wonder if any one could make him bite."

"Rob!" she whispered in the dog's ear, keeping her eyes fixed on the man, who had now nearly finished trimming his stick. "Rob! hiss-s-s-s!" and she patted his back.

Rob seemed to listen very attentively.

"Hiss-s-s!" she whispered again, her heart beating quick and hard.

Rob now raised his head, his big body began to quiver, and the hair on his back gradually rose on end.

"Hiss! Rob! Rob!" whispered Kate.

The man had shut up his knife, and was putting it in his pocket. He took the stick in his right hand.

All now depended on Rob.

"Oh! will he?" thought Kate, and then she sprang to her feet and clapped her hands.

"Catch him, Rob!" she screamed. "Catch him!"

With a rush, Rob hurled himself full at the breast of the man, and the tall fellow went over backward, just like a ten-pin.

Then he was up and out into the road, Rob after him!

You ought to have seen the gravel fly!

Harry and Kate ran out into the road and cheered and shouted. Away went the man, and away went the dog.

Up the road, into the brush, out again, and then into a field, down a hill, nip and tuck! At Tom Riley's fence, Rob got him by the leg, but the trowsers were old and the piece came out: and then the man dashed into Riley's old tobacco barn, and slammed the door almost on the dog's nose.

Rob ran around the house to see if there was an open window, and finding none, he went back to the door and lay down to wait.

Harry and Kate ran home as fast as they could, and after a while Rob came too. He had waited a reasonable time at the door of the barn, but the man had not come out.

CHAPTER XII.

TONY ON THE WAR-PATH.

"SHE did it all," said Harry, when they had told the tale to half the village, on the store-porch.

"I!" exclaimed Kate. "Rob, you mean."

"That's a good dog," said Mr. Darby, the storekeeper; "what'll you take for him?"

"Not for sale," said Harry.

"Rob's all very well," remarked Tony Kirk; "but it won't do to have a feller like that in the woods, a fright'nin' the children. I'd like to know who he is."

Just at this moment Uncle Braddock made his appearance, hurrying along much faster than he usually walked, with his eyes and teeth glistening in the sunshine.

"I seed him!" he cried, as soon as he came up.

"Who'd you see?" cried several persons.

"Oh! I seed de dog after him, and I come along as fas' as I could, but couldn't come very fas'. De ole wrapper cotch de wind."

"Who was it?" asked Tony.

"I seed him a-runnin'. Bress my soul! de dog like to got him!"

"But who was he, Uncle Braddock?" said Mr. Loudon, who had just reached the store from his house, where Kate, who had run home, had told the story. "Do you know him?"

"Know him? Reckon I does?" said Uncle Braddock, "an' de dog ud a knowed him too, ef he'd a cotched him! Dat's so, Mah'sr John."

"Well, tell us his name, if you know him," said Mr. Darby.

"Ob course, I knows him," said Uncle Braddock. "I'se done knowed him fur twenty or fifty years. He's George Mason."

The announcement of this name caused quite a sensation in the party.

"I thought he was down in Mississippi," said one man.

"So he was, I reckons," said Uncle Braddock, "but he's done come back now. I'se seed him afore to-day, and Aunt Matilda's seed him,

too. Yah, ha! Dat dere dog come mighty nigh cotchin' him!"

George Mason had been quite a noted character in that neighborhood five or six years before. He belonged to a good family, but was of a lawless disposition and was generally disliked by the decent people of the county. Just before he left for the extreme Southern States, it was discovered that he had been concerned in a series of horse-thefts, for which he would have been arrested had he not taken his departure from the State.

Few people, excepting Mr. Loudon and one or two others, knew the extent of his misdemeanors; and out of regard to his family, these had not been made public. But he had the reputation of being a wild, disorderly man, and now that it was known that he had contemplated boxing Kate Loudon's ears and whipping Harry, the indignation was very great.

Harry and Kate were favorites with everybody—white and black.

"I tell ye what I'm goin' to do," said Tony Kirk; "I'm goin' after that feller."

At this, half a dozen men offered to go along with Tony.

"What will you do, if you find him?" asked Mr. Loudon.

"That depends on circumstances," replied Tony.

"I am willing to have you go," said Mr. Loudon, who was a magistrate and a gentleman of much influence in the village, "on condition that if you find him you offer him no violence. Tell him to leave the county, and say to him, from me, that if he is found here again he shall be arrested."

"All right," said Tony; and he proceeded to make up his party.

There were plenty of volunteers; and for a while it was thought that Uncle Braddock intended to offer to go. But, if so, he must have changed his mind, for he soon left the village and went over to Aunt Matilda's and had a good talk with her. The old woman was furiously angry when she heard of the affair.

"I wish I'd been a little quicker," she said, "and dere wouldn't a been a red spot on him."

Uncle Braddock didn't know exactly what she meant; but he wished so, too.

Tony didn't want a large party. He chose four men who could be depended upon, and they started out that evening.

It was evident that Mason knew how to keep himself out of sight, for he had been in the vicinity a week or more—as Tony discovered, after a visit to Aunt Matilda—and no white person had seen him.

But Tony thought he knew the country quite as well as George Mason did, and he felt sure he should find him.

His party searched the vicinity quite thoroughly that night, starting from Tom Riley's tobacco barn; but they saw nothing of their man; and in the morning they made the discovery that Mason had borrowed one of Riley's horses, without the knowledge of its owner, and had gone off, north of the mica mine. Some negroes had seen him riding away.

So Tony and his men took horses and rode away after him. Each of them carried his gun, for they did not know in what company they might find Mason. A man who steals horses is

generally considered, especially in the country, to be wicked enough to do anything.

At a little place called Jordan's cross-roads, they were sure they had come upon him. Tom Riley's horse was found at the blacksmith's shop at the cross-roads, and the blacksmith said that he had been left there to have a shoe put on, and that the man who had ridden him had gone on over the fields toward a house on the edge of the woods, about a mile away.

So Tony and his men rode up to within a half-mile of the house, and then they dismounted, tied their horses, and proceeded on foot. They kept, as far as possible, under cover of the tall weeds and bushes, and hurried along silently and in single file, Tony in the lead. Thus they soon reached the house, when they quietly surrounded it.

But George Mason played them a pretty trick.

CHAPTER XIII.

Cousin Maria.

AFTER posting one of his men on each side of the house, which stood on the edge of a field, without any fence around it, Tony Kirk stepped up to the front door and knocked. The door was quickly opened by a woman.

"Why, Cousin Maria," said Tony, "is this you?"

"Certainly it's me, Anthony," said the woman; "who else should it be?"

Cousin Maria was a tall woman, dressed in black. She had gray hair and wore spectacles. She seemed very glad to see Tony, and shook hands with him warmly.

"I didn't know you lived here," said Tony.

"Well, I don't live here, exactly," said Cousin Maria; "but come in and sit awhile. You've been a-huntin', have you?"

"Well, yes," said Tony, "I am a-huntin'."

Without mentioning that he had some friends outside, Tony went in and sat down to talk with Cousin Maria. The man in front of the house had stepped to one side when the door opened, and the others were out of sight, of course.

Tony entered a small sitting-room, into which the front door opened, and took a seat by Cousin Maria.

"You see," said she, "old Billy Simpson let this house fur a hundred dollars—there's eighty acres with it—to Sarah Ann Hemphill and her husband; and he's gone to Richmond to git stock for a wheelwright's shop. That's his trade, you know; and they're goin' to have the shop over there in the wagon-house, that can be fixed up easy enough ef Sam Hemphill chooses to work at it, which I don't believe he will; but he *can* work, ef he will, and this is just the place for a wheelwright's shop, ef the right man goes into the business; and they sold their two cows—keeping only the red-and-white heifer. I guess you remember that heifer; they got her of old Joe Sanders, on the Creek. And they sold one of their horses—the sorrel—and a mule; they hadn't no use fur 'em here, fur the land's not

worth much, and hasn't seen no guano nor nothin' fur three or four years; and the money they got was enough to start a mighty good cooper-shop, ef Sam don't spend it all, or most of it, in Richmond, which I think he will; and of course, he being away, Sarah Ann wanted to go to her mother's, and she got herself ready and took them four children—and I pity the old lady, fur Sam's children never had no bringin' up. I disremember how old Tommy is, but it isn't over eight, and just as noisy as ef he wasn't the oldest. And so I come here to take care of the place; but I can't stay no longer than Tuesday fortnight, as I told Sarah Ann, fur I've got to go to Betsey Cropper's then to help her with her spinnin'; and there's my own things —seven pounds of wool to spin fur Truly Mattherses people, besides two bushel baskets, easy, of carpet-rags to sew, and I want 'em done by the time Miss Jane gits her loom empty, or I'll git no weavin' done this year, and what do you think? I've had another visitor to-day, and your comin' right afterwards kind o' struck me as mighty queer, both bein' Akeville people, so to speak, tho' it's been a long day since he's

been there, and you'll never guess who it was, fur it was George Mason."

And she stopped and wiped her face with her calico apron.

"So George Mason was here, was he?" said Tony. "Where is he now?"

"Oh! he's gone," replied Cousin Maria. "It wasn't more 'n ten or fifteen minutes before you came in, and he was a-sittin' here talking about ole times—he's rougher than he was, guess he didn't learn no good down there in Mississippi—when all ov a sudden he got up an' took his hat and walked off. Well, that was jist like George Mason. He never had much manners, and would always just as soon go off without biddin' a body good-by as not."

"You didn't notice which way he went, did you?" asked Tony,

"Yes, I did," said Cousin Maria; "he went out o' the back door, and along the edge of the woods, and he was soon out of sight, fur George has got long legs, as you well know; and the last I saw of him was just out there by that fence. And if there isn't Jim Anderson! Come in, Jim; what are you doin' standin' out there?"

So she went to the window to call Jim Anderson, and Tony stepped to the door and whistled for the other men, so that when Cousin Maria came to the door she saw not only Jim Anderson, but Thomas Campbell and Captain Bob Winters and Doctor Price's son Brinsley.

"Well, upon my word an' honor!" said Cousin Maria, lifting up both her hands.

"Come along, boys," said Tony, starting off toward the woods. "We've got no time to lose. Good-by, Cousin Maria."

"Good-by, Cousin Maria," said each of the other men, as the party hurried away.

Cousin Maria did not answer a word. She sat right down on the door-step and took off her spectacles. She rubbed them with her apron, and then put them on again. But there was no mistake. There were the men. If she had seen four ghosts she could not have been more astonished.

Tony did not for a moment doubt Cousin Maria's word when she told him that George Mason had gone away. She never told a lie. The only trouble with her was that she told too much truth.

In about an hour and a half the five men returned to the place where they had left their horses. They had found no trace of George Mason.

When they reached the clump of trees, there were no horses there!

They looked at each other with blank faces!

"He's got our horses!" said Jim Anderson, when his consternation allowed him to speak.

"Yes," said Tony, "and sarved us right. We oughter left one man here to take care uv 'em, knowin' George Mason as we do."

"I had an idea," said Dr. Price's son Brinsley, "that we should have done something of that kind."

"Idees ain't no good," said Tony with a grunt, as he marched off toward the blacksmith's shop at Jordan's cross-roads.

The blacksmith had seen nothing of Mason or the horses, but Tom Riley's horse was still there; and as the members of the party were all well known to the blacksmith, he allowed them to take the animal to its owner. So the five men rode the one horse back to Akeville; not all riding at once, but one at a time.

CHAPTER XIV.

HARRY'S GRAND SCHEME.

THIS wholesale appropriation of horses caused, of course, a great commotion in the vicinity of Akeville, and half the male population turned out the next day in search of George Mason and the five horses.

Even Harry was infected with the general excitement, and, mounted on old Selim, he rode away after dinner (there was no school that afternoon) to see if he could find any one who had heard anything. There ought to be news, for the men had been away all the morning.

About two miles from the village, the road on which Harry was riding forked, and not knowing that the party which had started off in that direction had taken the road which ran to the northeast, as being the direction in which a man would probably go, if he wanted to get

away safely with five stolen horses, Harry kept straight on.

The road was lonely and uninteresting. On one side was a wood of "old-field pines"—pines of recent growth and little value, that spring up on the old abandoned tobacco fields—and on the other a stretch of underbrush, with here and there a tree of tolerable size, but from which almost all the valuable timber had been cut.

Selim was inclined to take things leisurely, and Harry gradually allowed him to slacken his pace into a walk, and even occasionally to stop and lower his head to take a bite from some particularly tempting bunch of grass by the side of the road.

The fact was, Harry was thinking. He had entirely forgotten the five horses and everything concerning them, and was deeply cogitating a plan which, in an exceedingly crude shape, had been in his mind ever since he had met old Miles on the road to the railroad.

What he wished to devise was some good plan to prevent the interruption, so often caused by the rising of Crooked Creek, of communication between the mica mine, belonging to the

New York company, and the station at Hetertown.

If he could do this, he thought he could make some money by it; and it was, as we all know, very necessary for him, or at least for Aunt Matilda, that he should make money.

It was of no use to think of a bridge. There were bridges already, and when the creek was "up" you could scarcely see them.

A bridge that would be high enough and long enough would be very costly, and it would be an undertaking with which Harry could not concern himself, no matter what it might cost.

A ferry was unadvisable, for the stream was too rapid and dangerous in time of freshets.

There was nothing that was really reliable and worthy of being seriously thought of but a telegraph line. This Harry believed to be feasible.

He did not think it would cost very much. If this telegraph line only extended across the creek, not more than half a mile of wire, at the utmost, would be required.

Nothing need be expended for poles, as

there were tall pine-trees on each side of the creek that would support the wire; and there were two cabins, conveniently situated, in which the instruments could be placed.

Harry had thoroughly considered all these matters, having been down to the creek several times on purpose to take observations.

The procuring of the telegraphic instruments, however, and the necessity of having an operator on the other side, presented difficulties not easy to surmount.

But Harry did not despair.

To be sure the machines would cost money, and so would the wire, insulators, etc., but then the mica company would surely be willing to pay a good price to have their messages transmitted at times when otherwise they would have to send a man twenty miles to a telegraphic station.

So if the money could be raised it would pay to do it—at least if the calculations, with which Harry and Kate had been busy for days, should prove to be correct.

About the operator on the other side, Harry scarcely knew what to think. If it were necessary

to hire any one, that would eat terribly into the profits.

Something economical must be devised for this part of the plan.

As to the operator on the Akeville side of the creek, Harry intended to fill that position himself. He had been interested in telegraphy for a year or two. He understood the philosophy of the system, and had had the opportunity afforded him by the operator at Hetertown of learning to send messages and to read telegraphic hieroglyphics. He could not understand what words had come over the wires, simply by listening to the clicking of the instrument—an accomplishment of all expert telegraphers—but he thought he could do quite well enough if he could read the marks on the paper slips, and there was no knowing to what proficiency he might arrive in time.

Of course he had no money to buy telegraphic apparatus, wire, etc., etc. But he thought he could get it. "How does any one build railroads or telegraphic lines?" he had said to Kate. "Do they take the money out of their own pockets?"

Kate had answered that she didn't suppose they did, unless the money was there; and Harry had told her, very confidently, that the money was never there. No man, or, at least, very few men, could afford to construct a railroad or telegraph line. The way these things were done was by forming a company.

And this was just what Harry proposed to do.

It was, of course, quite difficult to determine just how large a company this should be. If it were composed of too many members, the profits, which would be limited, owing to the peculiar circumstances of the case, would not amount to much for each stockholder. And yet there must be members enough to furnish money enough.

And more than that, a contract must be made with the mica-mine people, so that the buiness should not be diverted from Harry's company into any outside channels.

All these things occupied Harry's mind, and it is no wonder that he hardly looked up when Selim stopped. The horse had been walking so slowly that stopping did not seem to make much difference.

But when he heard a voice call out, "Oh, Mah'sr Harry! I'se mighty glad to see yer!" he looked up quickly enough.

And there was old Uncle Braddock, on horseback!

Harry could scarcely believe his eyes.

And what was more astonishing, the old negro had no less than four other horses with him that he was leading, or rather trying to lead, out of a road through the old-field pines that here joined the main road.

"Why, what's the meaning of this?" cried Harry. "Where did you get those horses, Uncle Braddock?"

And then, without waiting for an answer, Harry burst out laughing. Such a ridiculous sight was enough to make anybody laugh.

Uncle Braddock sat on the foremost horse, his legs drawn up as if he were sitting on a chair, and a low one at that, for he had been gradually shortening the stirrups for the last hour, hoping in that way to get a firmer seat. His long stick was in one hand, his old hat was jammed down tightly over his eyes, and his dressing-gown floated in the wind like a rag-bag out for a holiday.

"Oh, I'se mighty glad to see yer, Mah'sr Harry!" said he, pulling at his horse's bridle in such a way as to make him nearly run into Selim and Harry, who, however, managed to avoid him and the rest of the cavalcade by moving off to the other side of the road.

"I was jist a-thinkin' uv gittin' off and lettin' 'em go 'long they own se'ves. I never seed sich hosses fur twistin' up and pullin' crooked. I 'spected to have my neck broke mor' 'n a dozen times. I never was so disgruntled in all my born days, Mah'sr Harry. Whoa dar, you yaller hoss! Won't you take a-hole, Mah'sr Harry, afore dey're de death uv me?"

The old man had certainly got the horses into a mixed-up condition. One of them was beside the horse he rode, two were behind, and one was wedged in partly in front of these in such a way that he had to travel sidewise. The bridle of one horse was tied to that of another, so that Uncle Braddock led them all by the bridle of the horse by his side. This was tied to his long cane, which he grasped firmly in his left hand.

Harry jumped down from Selim, and, tying

him to the fence, went over to the assistance of Uncle Braddock. As he was quite familiar with horses, Harry soon arranged matters on a more satisfactory footing. He disentangled the animals, two of which he proposed to take charge of himself, and then, after making Uncle Braddock lengthen his stirrups, and lead both his horses on one side of him, he fastened the other two horses side by side, mounted Selim, and started back for Akeville, followed by Uncle Braddock and his reduced cavalcade.

The old negro was profuse in his thanks; but in the middle of his protestations of satisfaction, Harry suddenly interrupted him.

"Why, look here, Uncle Braddock! Where did you get these horses? These are the horses George Mason stole."

"To be sure they is," said Uncle Braddock. "What would I be a-doin' wid 'em ef they wasn't?"

"But how did you get them? Tell me about it," said Harry, checking the impatient Selim, who, now that his head was turned homeward, was anxious to go on with as much expedition as possible under the circumstances.

"Why, ye see, Mah'sr Harry," said the old man, "I was up at Miss Maria's; she said she'd gi' me some pieces of caliker to mend me wrapper. I put 'em in me pocket, but I 'spects they's blowed out; and when I was a-comin' away fru de woods, right dar whar ole Elick Potts used to hab his cabin—reckon you nebber seed dat cabin; it was all tumbled down 'fore you was born—right dar in de clarin' I seed five horses, all tied to de trees. 'Lor's a massy!' I said to mesef, 'is de war come agin?' Fur I nebber seed so many hosses in de woods sence de war. An' den while I was a-lookin' roun' fur a tree big enough to git behind, wrapper an' all, out comes Mah'sr George Mason from a bush, an' he hollers, 'Hello, Uncle Braddock, you come a-here.' An' then he says, 'You ain't much, Uncle Braddock, but I guess you'll do!' An' I says, 'Don't believe I'll do, Mah'sr George, fur you know I can't march, an' I nebber could shoot none, an' I got de rheumertiz in both me legs and me back, and no jintwater in me knees—you can't make no soldier out er me, Mah'sr George.' And then he laughed, an' says, 'You would make a pretty

soldier, dat's true, Uncle Braddock. But I don't want no soldiers; what I want you to do is to take these horses home.' 'To where? says I. 'To Akeville,' says Mah'sr George. An' he didn't say much more, neither; for he jist tied dem horses all together and led 'em out into a little road dat goes fru de woods dar, an' he put me on de head horse, an' he says, 'Now, go 'long, Uncle Braddock, an' ef anything happens to dem hosses you'll have to go to jail fur it. So, look out!' An' bress your soul, Mah'sr Harry, I did have to look out, fur sich a drefful time as I did have, 'specially wid dat yaller hoss, I nebber did see."

CHAPTER XV.

The Council.

WHEN Harry's mother heard that he had gone off to try and meet the horse-hunters she was quite anxious about him.

But Mr. Loudon laughed at her fears.

"If there had been the slightest danger," he said, "of course I would not have allowed him to go. But I was glad he wanted to go. A youngster of his age ought to have a disposition to see what is going on and to take part, too, for that matter. I had much rather find it necessary to restrain Harry than to push him. You mustn't want to make a girl of him. You would only spoil the boy, and make a very poor girl."

Mrs. Loudon made no reply. She thought her husband was a very wise man; but she took up her key basket and went off to the pantry with an air that indicated that she had ideas of her own upon the subject in question.

Kate had no fears for Harry. She had unbounded faith in his good sense and his bravery, if he should happen to get into danger.

The fact is, she was quite a brave girl herself; and brave people are very apt to think their friends as courageous as themselves.

When Harry and Uncle Braddock reached the village they found several of the older inhabitants on the store porch, and they met with an enthusiastic reception.

And when, later in the afternoon, most of the men who had gone out after George Mason, returned from their unsuccessful expedition, the discussion in regard to Mason's strange proceeding grew very animated. Some thought he had only intended to play a trick; others that he had been unable to get away with the horses, as he had hoped to do when he had taken them.

But nobody knew anything about the matter excepting George Mason himself, and he was not there to give the village any information.

As for Harry, he did not stay long to hear the discussions at the store.

His mind was full of a much more important matter, and he ran off to find Kate. He

wanted to talk over his latest impressions with her.

When he reached the house, where his appearance greatly tranquillized his mother's mind, he found Kate in the yard under the big catalpa-trees, always a favorite place of resort in fine weather.

"Oh, Harry!" she cried, when she saw him, "did they find the horses?"

"No," said Harry; "they didn't find them."

"Oh, what a pity! And some of them were borrowed horses. Tony Kirk had Captain Caseby's mud-colored horse. I don't know what the captain will do without him."

"Oh, the captain will do very well," said Harry.

"But he can't do very well," persisted Kate. "It's the only horse he has in the world. One thing certain, they can't go to church."

Harry laughed at this, and then he told his sister all about his meeting with Uncle Braddock. But while she was wondering and surmising in regard to George Mason's strange conduct, Harry, who could not keep his thoughts from more important matters, broke in with:

"But, I say, Kate, I've made up my mind about the telegraph business. There must be a company, and we ought to plan it all out before we tell people and sell shares."

"That's right," cried Kate, who was always ready for a plan. "Let's do it now."

So, down she sat upon the ground, and Harry sat down in front of her.

Then they held a council.

"In the first place, we must have a President," said Harry.

"That ought to be you," said Kate.

"Yes," said Harry, "I suppose I ought to be President. And then we must have a Treasurer, and I think you should be Treasurer."

"Yes," said Kate, "that would do very well. But where could I keep the money?"

"Pshaw!" said Harry. "It's no use to bother ourselves about that. We'd better get the money first, and then see where we can put it. I reckon it'll be spent before anybody gets a chance to steal it. And now then, we must have a Secretary."

"How would Tom Selden do for Secretary?" asked Kate.

"Oh, he isn't careful enough," answered Harry. "I think you ought to be Secretary. You can write well, and you'll keep everything in order."

"Very well," said Kate, "I'll be Secretary."

"I think," said Harry, "that we have now about all the officers we want, excepting, of course, an Engineer, and I shall be Engineer; for I have planned out the whole thing already."

"I didn't know there was to be an engine," said Kate.

"Engine!" exclaimed Harry, laughing. "That's a good one! I don't mean an engineer of a steam-engine. What we want is a Civil Engineer; a man who lays out railroad lines and all that kind of thing. I'm not right sure that a Civil Engineer does plan out telegraph lines; but it don't make any difference what we call the officer. He'll have to attend to putting up the line."

"And do you think you can do it?" said Kate. "I should suppose it would be a good deal harder to be Engineer than to be President."

"Yes, I suppose it will; but I've studied the matter. I've watched the men putting up new

wires at Hetertown, and Mr. Lyons told me all he knew about it. It's easy enough. Very different from building a railroad."

"It must be a good deal safer to build a railroad, though," said Kate. "You don't have to go so high up in the air."

"You're a little goose," said Harry, laughing at her again.

"No, I'm not," said Kate. "I'm Treasurer and Secretary of the— What shall we call the company, Harry? It ought to have a name."

"Certainly it ought," said her brother. "How would 'The Mica Mine Telegraph Company'— No, that wouldn't do at all. It isn't theirs. It's ours."

"Call it 'The Loudon Telegraph Company,'" said Kate.

"That would be nearer the thing, but it wouldn't be very modest, though people often do call their companies after their own names. What do you think of 'The Akeville and Hetertown Company'?"

"But it won't go to either of those places," said Kate. "It will only cross the creek."

"All right!" exclaimed Harry. "Let's call it 'The Crooked Creek Telegraph Company.'"

"Good!" said Kate. "That's the very name."

So the company was named.

"Now," said Kate, "we've got all the head officers and the name; what do we want next?"

"We want a good many other things," said Harry. "I suppose we ought to have a Board of Directors."

"Shall we be in that?" asked Kate.

Harry considered this question before answering it. "I think the President ought to be in it," he said, "but I don't know about the Secretary and Treasurer. I think they are not generally Directors."

"Well," said Kate, with a little sigh, "I don't mind."

"You can be, if you want to," said Harry. "Wait until we get the Board organized, and I'll talk to the other fellows about it."

"Are they going to be all boys?" asked Kate, quickly.

"I reckon so," said Harry. "We don't want

any men in our Board. They'd be ordering us about and doing everything themselves."

"I didn't mean that. Will there be any girls?"

"No," said Harry, a little contemptuously, it is to be feared. "There isn't a girl in the village who knows anything about telegraph lines, except you."

"Well, if it's to be all boys, I don't believe I would care to belong to the Board," said Kate. "But who are we going to have?"

This selection of the members of the Board of Directors seemed a little difficult at first, but as there were so few boys to choose from it was settled in quite a short time.

Tom Selden, Harvey Davis, George Purvis, Dr. Price's youngest son, Brandeth, and Wilson Ogden, were chosen, and these, with the addition of Harry, made up the Board of Directors of the Crooked Creek Telegraph Company.

"Well," said Kate, as the council arose and adjourned, "I hope we'll settle the rest of our business as easily as we have settled this part."

CHAPTER XVI.

Company Business.

AFTER the selection of the Directors, all of whom accepted their appointments with great readiness, although, with the exception of Tom Selden, none of them had known anything about the company until informed by Harry of their connection with its management, it remained only to get subscriptions to the capital stock, and then the construction of the line might immediately begin.

Harry and Kate made out a statement of the probable expense, and a very good statement it was, for, as Harry had said, he had thoroughly studied up the matter, aided by the counsel of Mr. Lyons, the operator at Hetertown.

This statement, with the probable profits and the great advantages of such a line, was written out by Harry, and the Secretary, considering all

clerical work to be her especial business, made six fair copies, one of which was delivered to each of the Board of Directors, who undertook to solicit subscriptions.

A brief constitution was drawn up, and by a clause in this instrument, one-quarter of the profits were to go to the stockholders and the rest to Aunt Matilda.

The mica-mine men, when visited by Harry, who carried a letter from his father, at first gave the subject but little consideration, but after they found how earnest Harry was in regard to the matter and how, thoroughly he had studied up the subject, theoretically and practically, under the tuition of his friend, Mr. Lyons, they began to think that possibly the scheme might prove of advantage to them.

After a good deal of talk—enough to have settled much more important business—they agreed to take stock in the telegraph company, provided Harry and his Board purchased first-class instruments and appliances.

Their idea in insisting upon this was the suggestion of their manager, that if the boys failed in their project they might get possession

of the line and work it themselves. Consequently, with a view both to the present success of the association and their own possible acquisition of the line, they insisted on first-class instruments.

This determination discouraged Harry and his friends, for they had not calculated upon making the comparatively large expenditures necessary to procure these first-class instruments.

They had thought to buy some cheap but effective apparatus of which they had heard, and which, for amateur purposes, answered very well.

But when the mica-mine officers agreed to contribute a sum in proportion to the increased capital demanded, Harry became quite hopeful, and the other members of the Board agreed that they had better work harder and do the thing right while they were about it.

The capital of the company was fixed at one hundred and fifty dollars, and to this the mica-mine people agreed to subscribe fifty dollars. They also gave a written promise to give all the business of that kind that they might have for a year from date, to Harry and his associates, provided that the telegraphic service should

always be performed promptly and to their satisfaction.

A contract, fixing rates, etc., was drawn up, and Harry, the Directors, the Secretary, and the Treasurer, all and severally signed it. This was not actually necessary, but these officers, quite naturally, were desirous of doing all the signing that came in their way.

Private subscriptions came in more slowly. Mr. Loudon gave fifteen dollars, and Dr. Price contributed ten, as his son was a Director. Old Mr. Truly Matthews subscribed five dollars, and hoped that he should see his money back again; but if he didn't, he supposed it would help to keep the boys out of mischief. Small sums were contributed by other persons in the village and neighborhood, each of whom was furnished with a certificate of stock proportioned to the amount of the investment.

There were fifty shares issued, of three dollars each; and Miss Jane Davis, who subscribed one dollar and a quarter, got five-twelfths of a share. The members of the Board, collectively, put in thirty dollars.

The majority of the shareholders considered

their money as a donation to a good cause, for, of course, it was known that Aunt Matilda's support was the object of the whole business; but some hoped to make something out of it, and others contributed out of curiosity to see what sort of a telegraph the company would build, and how it would work.

It was urged by some wise people that if this money had been contributed directly to Aunt Matilda, it would have been of much more service to her; but other people, equally wise, said that in that case, the money could never have been raised.

The colored people, old and young, took a great interest in the matter, and some of them took parts of shares, which was better. Even John William Webster took seventy-five cents' worth of stock.

The most astonishing subscription was one from Aunt Matilda herself. One day she handed to Kate a ten-cent piece—silver, old style—and desired that that might be put into the company for her. Where she got it, nobody knew, but she had it, and she put it in.

Explanations were of no use. The fact of

the whole business being for her benefit made no impression on her. She wanted a share in the company, and was proud of her one-thirtieth part of a share.

Taking them as a whole, the Board of Directors appeared to have been very well chosen.

A SHAREHOLDER.

Tom Selden was a good fellow and a firm friend of Harry and Kate. They might always reckon upon his support, although he had the fault, when matters seemed a little undecided, of giving his advice at great length. But when a

thing was agreed upon he went to work without a word.

Harvey Davis was a large, blue-eyed boy, very quiet, with yellow hair. He was one of the best scholars in the Akeville school, and could throw a stone over the highest oak-tree by the church—something no other boy in the village could do. He made an admirable Director.

Dr. Price's son, Brandeth, and Wilson Ogden, lived some miles from the village, and sometimes one or the other of them did not get to a meeting of the Board until the business before it had been despatched. But they always attended punctually if there was a horse or a mule to be had in time, and made no trouble when they came.

George Purvis lived just outside of the village. He was a tall fellow with a little head. His father had been in the Legislature, and George was a great fellow to talk, and he was full of new ideas. If Harry and Kate had not worked out so thoroughly the plan of the company before electing the Directors, George would have given the rest of the Board a great deal of trouble.

When about four-fifths of the capital stock had been subscribed, and there was not much likelihood of their getting any more at present, the Board of Directors determined to go to work.

Acting under the advice and counsel of Mr. Lyons (who ought to have been a Director, but who was not offered the position), they sent to New York for two sets of telegraphic instruments—registers, keys, batteries, reels, etc., etc. —one set for each office, and for about half a mile of wire, with the necessary office-wire, insulators, etc.

This took pretty much all their capital, but they hoped to economize a good deal in the construction of the line, and felt quite hopeful.

But it seemed to be a long and dreary time that they had to wait for the arrival of their purchases from New York. Either Harry or one of the other boys rode over to Hetertown every day, and the attention they paid to the operation of telegraphy, while waiting for the train, was something wonderful.

It was a fortunate thing for the Board that, on account of the sickness of the teacher, the

vacation commenced earlier than usual in Akeville that year.

More than a week passed, and no word from New York. No wonder the boys became impatient. It had been a month, or more, since the scheme had been first broached in the village, and nothing had yet been done—at least, nothing to which the boys could point as evidence of progress.

The field of operation had been thoroughly explored. The pine-trees which were to serve as telegraph-poles had been selected, and contracts had been made with "One-eyed Lewston," a colored preacher, who lived near the creek on the Akeville side, and with Aunt Judy, who had a log-house on the Hetertown side, by which these edifices were to be used as telegraphic stations. The instruments and batteries, when not in use, were to be locked up in stationary cases, made by the Akeville carpenter, after designs by Harry.

Of course, while waiting for the arrival of their goods from New York, the Board met every day. Having little real business, their discussions were not always harmonious.

George Purvis grew discontented. Several times he said to Brandeth Price and Harvey Ogden that he didn't see why he shouldn't be something more than a mere Director, and a remark that Harvey once made, that if Harry and Kate had not chosen to ask him to join them he would not have been even a Director, made no impression upon him.

One day, when a meeting was in session by the roadside, near "One-eyed Lewston's" cabin —or the Akeville telegraph station, as I should say—George and Harry had a slight dispute, and Purvis took occasion to give vent to some of his dissatisfaction.

"I don't see what you're President for, anyway," said he to Harry. "After the Board of Directors had been organized it ought to have elected all the officers."

"But none of you fellows knew anything about the business," said Harry. "Kate and I got up the company, and we needn't have had a Board of Directors at all, if we hadn't wanted to. If any of you boys had known anything about telegraphs we would have given you an office."

"I reckon you don't have to know anything about telegraphs to be Secretary, or Treasurer either," said George, warmly.

"No," answered Harry, "but you've got to know how to keep accounts and to be careful and particular."

"Like your sister Kate, I suppose," said George, with a sneer.

"Yes, like Kate," answered Harry.

"I'd be ashamed of myself," said George, "if I couldn't get a better Secretary or Treasurer than a girl. I don't see what a girl is doing in the company, anyway. The right kind of a girl wouldn't be seen pushing herself in among a lot of boys that don't want her."

Without another word, the President of the Crooked Creek Telegraph Company arose and offered battle to George Purvis. The contest was a severe one, for Purvis was a tall fellow, but Harry was as tough as the sole of your boot, and he finally laid his antagonist on the flat of his back in the road.

George arose, put on his hat, dusted off his clothes, and resigned his position in the Board.

CHAPTER XVII.

Principally Concerning Kate.

DURING all this work of soliciting subscriptions, ordering instruments and batteries, and leasing stations, Kate had kept pretty much in the background. True, she had not been idle. She had covered a great deal of paper with calculations, and had issued certificates of stock, all in her own plain handwriting, to those persons who had put money into the treasury of the company. And she had received all that money, had kept accurate account of it, and had locked it up in a little box which was kindly kept for her in the iron safe owned by Mr. Darby, the store-keeper.

When the money was all drawn out and sent to New York, her duties became easier.

School had closed, as has been before stated, and although Kate had home duties and some home studies, she had plenty of time for out-

door life. But now she almost always had to enjoy that life alone, if we except the company of Rob, who generally kept faithfully near her so long as she saw fit to walk, but when she stopped to rest or to pursue some of her botanical or entomological studies he was very apt to wander off on his own account. He liked to keep moving.

One of her favorite resorts was what was called the "Near Woods," a piece of forest land not far from Mr. Loudon's house, and within calling distance of several dwellings and negro cabins. She visited Aunt Matilda nearly every day; but the woods around her cabin were principally pine, and pine forests are generally very sombre.

But the "Near Woods" were principally of oak and hickory, with dogwood, sweet gum, and other smaller trees here and there; and there were open spots where the sun shone in and where flowers grew and the insects loved to come, as well as heavily shaded places under grand old trees.

She thoroughly enjoyed herself in a wood like this. She did not feel in the least lonely,

although she would have found herself sadly alone in a busy street of a great city.

Here, she was acquainted with everything she saw. There was company for her on every side. She had not been in the habit of passing the trees and the bushes, the lichens and ferns, and the flowers and mosses as if they were merely people hurrying up and down the street. She had stopped and made their acquaintance, and now she knew them all, and they were her good friends, excepting a few, such as the poison-vines, and here and there a plant or reptile, with which she was never on terms of intimacy.

She would often sit and swing on a low-bending grape-vine, that hung between two lofty trees, sometimes singing, and sometimes listening to the insects that hummed around her, and all the while as happy a Kate as any Kate in the world.

It was here, on the grape-vine swing, that Harry found her, the day after his little affair with George Purvis.

"Why, Harry!" she cried, "I thought you were having a meeting."

"There's nothing to meet about," said Harry, seating himself on a big moss-covered root near Kate's swing.

"There will be when the telegraph things come," said Kate.

"Oh, yes, there'll be enough to do then, but it seems as if they were never coming. And I've been thinking about something, Kate. It strikes me that, perhaps, it would be better for you to hold only one office."

"Why? Don't I do well enough?" asked Kate, quickly, stopping herself very suddenly in her swinging.

"Oh, yes! you do better than any one else could. But, you see, the other fellows—I mean the Board—may think that some of them ought to have an office. I'd give them one of mine, but none of them would do for Engineer. They don't know enough about the business."

"Which office would you give up, if you were me?" asked Kate.

"Oh, I'd give up the Secretaryship, of course," said Harry. "Nobody but you must be Treasurer. Harvey Davis would make a very

good Secretary, considering that there's so little writing to do now."

"Well, then," said Kate, "let Harvey be Secretary."

There was no bitterness or reproachfulness in Kate's words, but she looked a little serious, and began to swing herself very vigorously. It was evident that she felt this resignation of her favorite office much more deeply than she chose to express. And no wonder. She had done all the work; she had taken a pride in doing her work well, and now, when the company was about to enter upon its actual public life, she was to retire into the background. For a Treasurer had not much to do, especially now that there was so little money. There was scarcely a paper for the Treasurer to sign. But the Secretary— Well, there was no use of thinking any more about it. No doubt Harry knew what was best. He was with the Board every day, and she scarcely ever met the members.

Harry saw that Kate was troubled, but he didn't know what to say, and so he whittled at the root on which he was sitting.

"I should think, Harry," said Kate directly,

"that George Purvis would want to be Secretary. He's just the kind of a boy to like to be an officer of some kind."

"Oh, he can't be an officer," said Harry, still whittling at the root. "He has resigned."

"George Purvis resigned!" exclaimed Kate. "Why, what did he do that for?"

"Oh, we didn't agree," said Harry; "and we're better off without him. We have Directors enough as it is. Five is a very good number. There can't be a tie vote with five members in the Board."

Kate suspected that something had happened that she was not to be told. But she asked no questions.

After a few minutes of swinging and whittling, in which neither of them said anything, Kate got out of her grape-vine swing and picked up her hat from the ground, and Harry jumped up and whistled for Rob.

As they walked home together, Kate said:

"Harry, I think I'd better resign as Treasurer. Perhaps the officers ought all to be boys."

"Look here, Kate," said Harry; and he

stopped as he spoke, "I'm not going to have anybody else as Treasurer. If you resign that office I'll smash the company!"

Of course, after that there was nothing more to be said, and Kate remained Treasurer of the Crooked Creek Telegraph Company.

Before very long, of course, she heard the particulars of George Purvis's resignation. She didn't say much about it, but she was very glad that it was not Harry who had been whipped.

The next morning, quite early—the birds and the negroes had been up some time, but everybody in Mr. Loudon's house was still sleeping soundly—Harry, who had a small room at the front of the house, was awakened by the noise of a horse galloping wildly up to the front gate, and by hearing his name shouted out at the top of a boy's voice.

The boy was Tom Selden, and he shouted:

"Oh, Harry! Harry Loudon! Hello, there! The telegraph things have come!"

Harry gave one bound. He jerked on his clothes quicker than you could say the multiplication table, and he rushed down stairs and into the front yard.

It was actually so! The instruments and batteries and everything, all packed up in boxes —Tom couldn't say how many boxes—had come by a late train, and Mr. Lyons had sent word over to his house last night, and he'd been over there this morning by daybreak and had seen one of the boxes, and it was directed, all right, to the Crooked Creek Telegraph Company, and—

There was a good deal more intelligence, it appeared, but it wasn't easy to make it out, for Harry was asking fifty questions, and Kate was calling out from one of the windows, and Dick Ford and half-a-dozen other negro boys were running up and shouting to each other that the things had come. Mr. Loudon came out to see what all the excitement was about, and he had to be told everything by Tom and Harry, both at once; and Rob and Blinks were barking, and there was hubbub enough.

Harry shouted to one of the boys to saddle Selim, and when the horse was brought around in an incredibly short time—four negroes having clapped on his saddle and bridle—Harry ran into the house to get his hat; but just as he had

bounced out again, his mother appeared at the front door.

"Harry!" she cried, "you're not going off without your breakfast!"

"Oh, I don't want any breakfast, mother," he shouted.

"But you cannot go without your breakfast. You'll be sick."

"But just think!" expostulated Harry. "The things have been there all night."

"It makes no difference," said Mrs. Loudon. "You must have your breakfast first."

Mr. Loudon now put in a word, and Selim was led back to the stable.

"Well, I suppose I must," said poor Harry, with an air of resignation. "Come in, Tom, and have something to eat."

The news spread rapidly. Harvey Davis was soon on hand, and by the time breakfast was over, nearly every body in the village knew that the telegraph things had come.

Harry and Tom did not get off as soon as they expected, for Mr. Loudon advised them to take the spring-wagon—for they would need it to haul their apparatus to the telegraphic sta-

tions—and the horse had to be harnessed, and the cases which were to protect the instruments, when not in use, were to be brought from the carpenter-shop, and so it seemed very late before they started.

Just as they were ready to go, up galloped Brandeth Price and Wilson Ogden. So away they all went together, two of the Board in the wagon and three on horseback.

Kate stood at the front gate looking after them. Do what she would, she could not help a tear or two rising to her eyes. Mr. Loudon noticed her standing there, and he went down to her.

"Never mind Kate,' said he. "I told them not to unpack the things until they had hauled them to the creek; and I'll take you over to Aunt Judy's in the buggy. We'll get there by the time the boys arrive."

CHAPTER XVIII.

The Arrival.

WHEN Kate and her father reached Aunt Judy's cabin, the boys had not yet arrived, but they were anxiously expected by about a dozen colored people of various ages and sizes, and by two or three white men, who were sitting under the trees waiting to see the "telegraph come."

Telegraph apparatus and wires were not at all novel in that part of the country, but this was to be the first time that anything of the kind had been set up in that neighborhood, in those familiar old woods about Crooked Creek.

And then it must be remembered, too, that most of these interested people were "stockholders." That was something entirely novel, and it is no wonder that they were anxious to see their property.

"I hopes, Mah'sr John," said Aunt Judy

to Mr. Loudon, "dat dem dar merchines ain't a-goin' to bust up when dey're lef' h'yar all alone by theyselves."

"Oh, there's no danger, Aunt Judy," said Mr. Loudon, "if you don't meddle with them. But I suppose you can't do that, if the boys are going to case them up, as they told me they intended doing."

"Why, bress your soul, Mah'sr John, ye needn't be 'fraid o' my techin' 'em off. I wouldn't no more put a finger on 'em dan I'd pull de trigger ov a hoss pistol."

"There isn't really any danger in having these instruments in the house, is there, father?" asked Kate, when she and Mr. Loudon had stepped out of the cabin where Aunt Judy was busy sweeping and "putting things to rights" in honor of the expected arrival.

"That depends upon circumstances," said Mr. Loudon. "If the boys are careful to disconnect the instruments and the wires when they leave the cabins, there is no more danger than there would be in a brass clock. But if they leave the wires attached to the instruments, lightning might be attracted into the cabins

during a thunder-storm, and Aunt Judy might find the 'merchines' quite as dangerous as a horse-pistol."

"But they mustn't leave the wires that way," said Kate. "I sha'n't let Harry forget it. Why, it would be awful to have Aunt Judy and poor old Lewston banged out of their beds in the middle of the night."

"I should think so," said Mr. Loudon; "but the boys—I am sure about Harry—understand their business, to that extent, at least. I don't apprehend any accidents of that kind."

Kate was just about to ask her father if he feared accidents of any kind, when a shout was heard from the negroes by the roadside.

"Dar dey come!" sang out half-a-dozen voices, and, sure enough, there was the wagon slowly turning an angle of the road, with the mounted members of the Board riding close by its side.

All now was bustle and eagerness. Everybody wanted to do something, and everybody wanted to see. The wagon was driven up as close to the cabin as the trees would allow; the boys jumped down from their seats and saddles;

the horses' bridles were fastened to branches overhead; white, black, and yellow folks clustered around the wagon; and some twenty hands were proffered to aid in carrying the load into the cabin.

Harry was the grand director of affairs. He had a good, loud voice, and it served him well on this important occasion.

"Look out, there!" he cried. "Don't any of you touch a box or anything, till I tell you what to do. They're not all to go into Aunt Judy's cabin. Some things are to go across the creek to Lewston's house. Here, John William and Gregory, take this table and carry it in carefully; and you, Dick, take that chair. Don't be in a hurry. We're not going to open the boxes out here."

"Why, Harry," cried Kate, "I didn't know there were to be tables and chairs."

"To tell the truth, I didn't think of it either," said Harry; "but we must have something to put our instruments on, and something to sit on while we work them. Mr. Lyons reminded us that we'd have to have them, and we got these in Hetertown. Had to go to three places to get

them all, and one's borrowed, anyway. Look out there, you, Bobby! you can't carry a chair. Get down off that wheel before you break your neck.

"Lor' bress your heart, Mah'sr Harry, is ye got a bed? I never did 'spect ye was agoin' to bring furniture," cried Aunt Judy, her eyes rolling up and down in astonishment and delight. "Dat's a pooty cheer. Won't hurt a body to sot in dat cheer when you all ain't a-usin' it, will it?"

"Blow you right through the roof, if you set on the trigger," said Tom Selden; "so mind you're careful, Aunt Judy."

"Now, then," cried Harry, "carry in this box. Easy, now. We'll take all the wire over on the other side. You see, Tom, that they leave the wire in the wagon. Do you know, father, that we forgot to bring a hammer or anything to open these boxes?"

"There's a hammer under the seat of the buggy. One of you boys run and get it."

At the word, two negro boys rushed for the buggy and the hammer.

"A screw-driver would do better," said Harvey Davis.

"One-eyed Lewston's got a screw-driver," said one of the men.

"Dar Lewston!" cried John William Webster. "Dar he! Jist comin' ober de bridge."

"Shet up!" cried Aunt Judy. "Don't 'spect he got him screw-driber in him breeches pocket, does ye? Why don' ye go 'long and git it?"

And away went John William and two other boys for the screw-driver.

In spite of so many cooks, the broth was not spoiled; and after a reasonable time the beautifully polished instruments were displayed to view on the table in Aunt Judy's cabin.

Everybody looked with all their eyes. Even Mr. Loudon, who had often examined telegraphic apparatus, took a great interest in this, and the negroes thought there was never anything so wonderful. Especially were those delighted who owned stock.

"Some o' dat dar's mine," said a shiny-faced black boy. "Wonder ef dat little door-knob's my sheer."

"You go 'long, dar," said Dick Ford, giving him a punch in the ribs with his elbow. "Dat little shiny screw's 'bout as much as you own."

As for the members of the Board, they were radiant. There was the telegraphic apparatus (or a part of it) of the Crooked Creek Telegraph Company, and here were the officers!

Each one of them, except Brandeth Price, explained some portion of the instruments to some of the bystanders.

As for Brandeth, he hadn't an idea what was to be done with anything. But he had a vote in the Board. He never forgot that.

"Can't ye work it a little, Mah'sr Harry!" asked Gregory Montague.

"Dat's so!" cried a dozen voices. "Jist let's see her run a little, Mah'sr Harry, please!" Even Kate wanted to see how the things worked.

Harry explained that he couldn't "run it" until he had arranged the battery and had made a great many preparations, and he greatly disappointed the assembly by informing them that all that was to be done that day was to put the instruments in their respective houses (or stations, as the boys now began to call the cabins), and to put up the cases which were to protect them when not in use. These cases were like small closets, with movable tops, and there was

great fear that they would not fit over the tables that had been brought from Hetertown.

On the next day, Mr. Lyons had promised to come over and show them how to begin the work.

"There'll be plenty for you fellows to do," said Harry, "when we put up the wires."

CHAPTER XIX.

Constructing the Line.

THE next day was a day of hard work for the Board of Managers. Mr. Lyons, who took the greatest interest in the enterprise, got another operator to take his place at the Hetertown station, and came over to help the boys.

Under his direction, and with his help, they arranged the instruments and the batteries, sunk the ground-wires, and, in a general way, put the office-apparatus in working order. When night came, there were still some things that remained to be done in the two stations, but the main part of the office arrangements had been satisfactorily concluded, under Mr. Lyons's supervision.

Now, it only remained to put up the wire; and this was a piece of work that interested the whole neighborhood. There had been lookers-on enough while the instruments were being

put in working order, but the general mind did not comprehend the mechanism and uses of registers and keys and batteries.

Any one, however, could understand how a telegraphic wire was put up. And what was more, quite a number of persons thought they knew exactly how it ought to be put up, and made no scruple of saying so.

Tony Kirk was on hand—as it was not turkey season—and he made himself quite useful. Having had some experience in working under surveyors, he gave the boys a good deal of valuable advice, and, what was of quite as much service, he proved very efficient in quieting the zeal of some ambitious, but undesirable, volunteer assistants.

Certain straight pine-trees, at suitable distances from each other, and, as nearly as possible, on a right line between the two cabins, were selected as poles, and their tops were cut off about twenty-five feet from the ground. All trees and branches that would be apt to interfere with the wires were cut down, out of the way.

At one time—for this matter of putting up

the wire occupied several days—there were ten or twelve negro men engaged in cutting down trees, and in topping and trimming telegraph poles.

Each one of these men received forty cents per day from the company, and found themselves. It is probable that if the Board had chosen to pay but twenty cents, there would have been quite as many laborers, for this was novel and very interesting work, and several farm-hands threw up their situations for a day or two and came over to "cut fur de telegraph."

When the poles were all ready on each side of the creek, the insulators, or glass knobs, to which the wires were to be attached, were to be fastened to them, a foot or two from the top.

This was to be done under Harry's direction, who had studied up the theory of the operation from his books and under Mr. Lyons.

But the actual work proved very difficult. The first few insulators Harry put up himself. He was a good climber, but not being provided with the peculiar "climbers" used by the men who put up telegraph wires, he found it very

hard to stay up at the top of a pole after he had got there, especially as he needed both hands to nail to the tree the wooden block to which the insulator was attached.

In fact, he made a bad business of it, and the insulators he put up in this way looked "shackling poorly," to say nothing of his trowsers, which suffered considerably every time he slipped part way down a pole.

But here Tony Kirk again proved himself a friend in need. He got a wagon, and drove four miles to a farm-house, where there was a long, light ladder. This he borrowed, and brought over to the scene of operation.

This ladder was not quite long enough to reach to the height at which Harry had fastened his insulators, but it was generally agreed that there was no real necessity for putting them up so high.

The ladder was arranged by Tony in a very ingenious way. He laid it on the ground, with the top at the root of the tree to be climbed. Then he fastened a piece of telegraph wire to one side of the ladder, passed it loosely around the tree, and fastened it to the other side.

Then, as the ladder was gradually raised, the wire slipped along up the tree, and when the ladder was in position it could not fall, although it might shake and totter a little. However, strong arms at the bottom held it pretty steady, and Harry was enabled to nail on his insulators with comparative ease, and in a very satisfactory manner.

After a while, Tony took his place, and being a fellow whom it was almost impossible to tire, he finished the whole business without assistance.

It may be remarked that when Tony mounted the ladder, he dispensed with the wire safeguard, depending upon the carefulness of the two negro men who held the ladder from below.

The next thing was to put up the wire itself, and this was done in rather a bungling manner, if this wire were compared with that of ordinary telegraph lines.

It was found quite impossible to stretch the wire tightly between the poles, as the necessary appliances were wanting.

Various methods of tightening were tried, but none were very successful; and the wire

hung in curves, some greater and some less, between the poles.

But what did it matter? There was plenty of wire, and the wind had not much chance to blow it about, as it was protected by the neighboring treetops.

There was no trouble in carrying the wire over the creek, as the bridge was very near, and as trees close to each bank had been chosen for poles, and as the creek was not very wide, the wire approached nearer to a straight line where it passed over the water than it did anywhere else.

At last all was finished. The "main line" wire was attached to the copper office-wire. The batteries were charged, the register was arranged with its paper strip, and everything was ready for the transmission of messages across Crooked Creek.

At least, the Board hoped that everything was ready. It couldn't be certain until a trial was made.

The trial was made, and everybody in the neighborhood, who could get away from home, came to see it made.

Harry was at the instrument on the Akeville side, and Mr. Lyons (the second operator of the company had not been appointed) attended to the other end of the line, taking his seat at the table in Aunt Judy's cabin, where Mr. and Mrs. Loudon, Kate, and as many other persons as the room would hold, were congregated.

As President of the company, Harry claimed the privilege of sending the first message.

Surrounded by the Board, and a houseful of people besides, he took his seat at the instrument, and after looking about him to see if everything was in proper order, he touched the key to "call" the operator at the other end.

But no answer came. Something was wrong. Harry tried again, but still no answer. He jumped up and examined the instrument and the battery.

Everybody had something to say, and some advice to give.

Even old "One-eyed Lewston" pushed his way up to Harry, and exclaimed:

"Oh, Mah'sr Harry! Ef you want to grease her, I got some hog's-lard up dar on dat shelf."

But Harry soon thought he found where the fault lay, and, adjusting a screw or two, he tried the key again. This time his call was answered.

"Click! click! click! click!" went the instrument.

Wild with excitement, everybody crowded closer to Harry, who, with somewhat nervous fingers, slowly sent over the line of the Crooked Creek Telegraph Company its first message.

When received on the other side, and translated from the dots and dashes of the register, it read thus:

To Kate.—Ho-ow are you?

Directly the answer came swiftly from the practised fingers of Mr. Lyons:

To Harry.—I am very well.

This message had no sooner been received and announced than Harry, followed by every one else, rushed out of the house, and there, on the other side of the creek, he saw his father and mother and Kate and all the rest hurrying out of Aunt Judy's cabin.

Mr. Loudon waved his hat and shouted, "Hurrah!"

Harry and the Board answered with a wild "Hurrah!"

Then everybody took it up, and the woods rang with, "Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!"

The Crooked Creek Telegraph Line was a success!

CHAPTER XX.

An Important Meeting of the Board.

NOW that the telegraphic line was built, and in good working order, it became immediately necessary to appoint another operator, or it was quite evident that Harry could not work both ends of the line.

It was easy enough to appoint an operator, but not so easy for such person to work the instruments. In fact, Harry was the only individual in the company or the neighborhood who understood the duties of a telegrapher, and his opportunities for practice had been exceedingly limited.

It was determined to educate an operator, and Harvey Davis was chosen as the most suitable individual for the position. So, day after day was spent by Harry and Harvey, the one in the cabin of "One-eyed Lewston," and the other in that of Aunt Judy, in steady, though

often unsatisfactory, practice in the transmission and reading of telegraphic messages.

Of course, great interest was taken in their progress, and some members of the Board were generally present at one or the other of the stations. Kate often came over to Aunt Judy's cabin, and almost always there were other persons present, each of whom, whenever there was a chance, was eager to send a telegraphic message gratis, even if it were only across Crooked Creek.

Sometimes neither Harry nor Harvey could make out what the other one was trying to say, and then they would run out of the station and go down to the bank of the creek and shout across for explanations. A great many more intelligible messages were sent in this way, for the first few days, than were transmitted over the wire.

Tony Kirk remarked, after a performance of this kind, "It 'pears to me that it wasn't no use to put up that ar wire, fur two fellows could a been app'inted, one to stand on each side o' the creek, and holler the messages across."

But, of course, such a proceeding would

have been extremely irregular. Tony was not accustomed to the strict requirements of business.

Sometimes the messages were extremely complicated. For instance, Harry, one day about noon, carefully telegraphed the following:

I would not go home. Perhaps you can get something to eat from Aunt Judy.

As Harvey translated this, it read:

I would gph go rapd gradsvlt bodgghip rda goqbsjcm eat dkpx Aunt Judy.

In answer to this, Harvey attempted to send the following message:

What do you mean by eating Aunt Judy?

But Harry read:

Whatt a xdll mean rummmlgigdd Ju!

Harry thought, of course, that this seemed like a reflection on his motives in proposing that Harvey could ask Aunt Judy to give him something to eat, and so, of course, there had to be explanations.

After a time, however, the operators became much more expert, and although Harvey was

always a little slow, he was very careful and very patient — most excellent qualities in an operator upon such a line.

The great desire now, not only among the officers of the company, but with many other folks in Akeville and the neighborhood, was to see the creek "up," so that travel across it might be suspended, and the telegraphic business commence.

To be sure, there might be other interests with which a rise in the creek would interfere, but they, of course, were considered of small importance, compared with the success of an enterprise like this.

But the season was very dry, and the creek very low. There were places where a circus-man could have jumped across it with all his pockets full of telegraphic messages.

In the mean time, the affairs of the company did not look very flourishing. The men who assisted in the construction of the line had not been paid in full, and they wanted their money. Kate reported that the small sum which had been appropriated out of the capital stock for the temporary support of Aunt Matilda was all

gone. This report she made in her capacity as a special committee of one, appointed (by herself) to attend to the wants of Aunt Matilda. As the Treasurer of the company, she also reported that there was not a cent in its coffers.

In this emergency, Harry called a meeting of the Board.

It met, as this was an important occasion, in Davis's corn-house, fortunately now empty. This was a cool, shady edifice, and, though rather small, was very well ventilated. The meetings had generally been held under some big tree, or in various convenient spots in the woods near the creek, but nothing of that kind would be proper for such a meeting as this, especially as Kate, as Treasurer, was to be present. This was her first appearance at a meeting of the Board. The boys sat on the corn-house floor, which had been nicely swept out by John William Webster, and Kate had a chair on the grass, just outside of the door. There she could hear and see with great comfort without "settin' on the floor with a passel of boys," as Miss Eliza Davis, who furnished the chair, elegantly expressed it.

When the meeting had been called to order

(and John William, who evinced a desire to hang around and find out what was going on, had been discharged from further attendance on the Board, or, in other words, had been ordered to "clear out"), and the minutes of the last meeting had been read, and the Treasurer had read her written report, and the Secretary had read his, an air of despondency seemed to settle upon the assembly.

An empty corn-house seemed, as Tom Selden remarked, a very excellent place for them to meet.

The financial condition of the company was about as follows:

It owed "One-eyed Lewston" and Aunt Judy one dollar each for one month's rent of their homesteads as stations, the arrangement having been made about the time the instruments were ordered.

It owed four dollars and twenty cents to the wood-cutters who worked on the construction of the line, and two dollars and a half for other assistance at that time.

("Wish we had done it all ourselves," said Wilson Ogden.)

It owed three dollars, balance on furniture procured at Hetertown. (It also owed one chair, borrowed.)

It owed, for spikes and some other hardware procured at the store, one dollar and sixty cents.

In addition to this, it owed John William Webster, who had been employed as a sort of general agent to run errands and clean up things, seventy-five cents—balance of salary—and he wanted his money.

To meet these demands, as was before remarked, they had nothing.

Fortunately nothing was owing for Aunt Matilda's support, Harry and Kate having from the first determined never to run in debt on her account.

But, unfortunately, poor Aunt Matilda's affairs were never in so bad a condition. The great interest which Kate and Harry had taken in the telegraph line had prevented them from paying much attention to their ordinary methods of making money, and now that the company's appropriation was spent, there seemed to be no

immediate method of getting any money for the old woman's present needs.

This matter was not strictly the business of the Board, but they nevertheless considered it.

CHAPTER XXI.

A Last Resort.

THE Board was fully agreed that something must be done to relieve Aunt Matilda's present necessities, but what to do did not seem very clear.

Wilson Ogden proposed issuing some kind of scrip or bonds, redeemable in six or seven months, when the company should be on a paying basis.

"I believe," said he, "that Mr. Darby would take these bonds at the store for groceries and things, and we might pay him interest, besides redeeming the bonds when they came due."

This was rather a startling proposition. No one had suspected Wilson of having such a financial mind.

"I don't know," said Harry, "how that would work. Mr. Darby might not be willing to take the bonds; and besides that, it seems to

me that the company ought not to make any more promises to pay when it owes so much already."

"But you see that would be different," said Wilson. "What we owe now we ought to pay right away. The bonds would not have to be paid for ever so long."

"That may be pretty sharp reasoning," remarked Tom Selden, "but I can't see into it."

"It would be all the same as running in debt for Aunt Matilda, wouldn't it?" asked Kate.

"Yes," said Wilson, "a kind of running in debt, but not exactly the common way. You see—"

"But if it's any kind at all, I'm against it," said Kate, quickly. "We're not going to support Aunt Matilda that way."

This settled the matter. To be sure, Kate had no vote in the Board; but this was a subject in which she had what might be considered to be a controlling interest, and the bond project was dropped.

Various schemes were now proposed, but there were objections to all of them. Every one

was agreed that it was very unfortunate that this emergency should have arisen just at this time, because as soon as the company got into good working order, and the creek had been up a few times it was probable that Aunt Matilda would really have more money than she would absolutely need.

"You ought to look out, Harry and Kate," said Harvey Davis, "that all the darkies she knows don't come and settle down on her and live off her. She's a great old woman for having people around her, even now."

"Well," said Kate, "she has a right to have company if she wants to, and can afford it."

"Yes," said Tom Selden; "but having company's very different from having a lot of good-for-nothing darkies eating her out of house and home."

"She won't have anything of that sort," said Harry. "I'll see that her money's spent right."

"But if it's her money," said Harvey, "she can spend it as she chooses."

A discussion here followed as to the kind of influence that ought to be brought to bear upon Aunt Matilda to induce her to make a judicious

use of her income; but Harry soon interrupted the arguments, with the remark that they had better not bother themselves about what Aunt Matilda should do with her money when she got it, until they had found out some way of preventing her from starving to death while she was waiting for it.

This was evidently good common sense, but it put a damper on the spirits of the Board.

There was nothing new to be said on the main question, and it was now growing toward supper-time; so the meeting adjourned.

On their way home, Harry said to Kate, "Has Aunt Matilda anything to eat at all?"

"Oh yes; she has enough for her supper to-night, and for breakfast, too, if nobody comes to see her. But that's all."

"All right, then," said Harry.

"I don't think it is all right," replied Kate. "What's two meals, I'd like to know?"

"Two meals are very good things, provided you don't take them both at once," said Harry. And he began to whistle.

The next day, Harry went off and staid until dinner-time.

Kate could not imagine where he had gone. He was not with the Board, she knew, for Harvey Davis had been inquiring for him.

Just before dinner he made his appearance.

Kate was in the house, but he hurried her out under the catalpa-tree."

"Look here!" said he, putting his hand in his pocket and pulling out several "greenbacks." "I reckon that'll keep Aunt Matilda until the company begins to make money."

Kate opened her eyes their very widest.

"Why, where on earth did you get all that money, Harry? Is it yours?"

"Of course it's mine," said Harry. "I sold my gun."

"Oh, Harry!" and the tears actually came into Kate's eyes.

"Well, I wouldn't cry about it," said Harry. "There's nothing to shoot now; and when we get rich I can buy it back again, or get another."

"Get rich!" said Kate. "I don't see how we're going to do that; especially when it's such dreadfully dry weather."

CHAPTER XXII.

A Quandary.

ABOUT a week after the meeting of the Board in the Davis corn-house, old Miles, the mail-rider, came galloping up to Mr. Loudon's front gate. The family were at breakfast, but Harry and Kate jumped up and ran to the door, when they saw Miles coming, with his saddle-bags flapping behind him. No one had ever before seen Miles ride so fast. A slow trot, or rather a steady waddle, was the pace that he generally preferred.

"Hello, Mah'sr Harry," shouted old Miles, "de creek's up! Can't git across dar, no how?"

This glorious news for the Crooked Creek Telegraph Company was, indeed, true! There had been wet weather for several days, and although the rain-fall had not been great in the level country about Akeville, it had been very heavy up among the hills; and the consequence

was, that the swollen hill-streams, or "branches" as they are called in that part of the country, had rushed down and made Crooked Creek rise in a hurry. It seemed to be always ready to rise in this way, whenever it had a chance.

Now the company could go to work! Now it could show the world, or as much of the world as chose to take notice, the advantages of having a telegraph line across a creek in time of freshets.

Harry was all alive with excitement. He sent for Harvey Davis, and had old Selim saddled as quickly as possible.

"H'yar's de letters and telegrums, Mah'sr Harry," said Miles, unlocking his saddle-bags and taking out a bundle of letters and some telegrams, written on the regular telegraphic blanks and tied up in a little package.

As the mail was a private one, and old Miles was known to be perfectly honest, he carried the key and attended personally to the locking and unlocking of his saddle-bags.

"But I don't want the letters, Miles," said Harry. "I've nothing to do with them. Give me the telegrams, and I'll send them across."

"Don't want de letters?" cried Miles, his eyes and mouth wide open in astonishment. "Why, I can't carry de letters ober no mor'n I kin de telegrums."

"Well, neither can I," said Harry.

"Den what's de use ob dat wire?" exclaimed Miles. "I thought you uns ud send de letters an' all ober dat wire? Dere's lots more letters dan telegrums."

"I know that," said Harry, hurriedly; "but we can't send letters. Give the telegraphic messages, and you go back to the mines with the letters, and if there's anything in them that they want to telegraph, let them write out the messages, and you bring them over to Lewston's cabin."

Harry took the telegrams, and old Miles rode off, very much disturbed in his mind. His confidence in the utility of the telegraph company was wofully shaken.

By this time Harvey had arrived on a mule, and the two operators dashed away as fast as their animals would carry them.

As they galloped along, Harry shouted to

Harvey, who kept ahead most of the time, for his mule was faster than Selim:

"Hello, Harvey! If Miles couldn't get across, how can either of us go over?"

"Oh, I reckon the creek isn't much up yet," answered Harvey. "Miles is easily frightened."

So, on they rode, hoping for the best; but when they reached the creek they saw, to their dismay, that the water was much higher already than it usually rose in the summer-time. The low grounds on each side were overflowed, and nothing could be seen of the bridge but the tops of two upright timbers near its middle.

It was certainly very unfortunate that both the operators were on the same side of the stream!

"This is a pretty piece of business,' cried Harry. "I didn't expect the creek to get up so quickly as this. I was down here yesterday, and it hadn't risen at all. I tell you, Harvey, you ought to live on the other side."

"Or else you ought," said Harvey.

"No," said Harry; "this is my station."

Harvey had no answer ready for this, but as

they were hurriedly fastening Selim and the mule to trees near Lewston's cabin, he said:

"Perhaps Mr. Lyons may come down and work the other end of the line."

"He can't get off," said Harry. "He has his own office to attend to. And, besides, that wouldn't do. We must work our own line, especially at the very beginning. It would look nice—now, wouldn't it?—to wait until Mr. Lyons could come over from Hetertown before we could commence operations!"

"Well, what can we do?" asked Harvey.

"Why, one of us must get across, somehow."

"I don't see how it's going to be done," said Harvey, as they ran down to the edge of the water. "I reckon we'll have to holler our messages across, as Tony said; only there isn't anybody to holler to."

"I don't know how it's to be done either," said Harry; "but one of us must get over, some way or other."

"Couldn't we wade to the bridge," asked Harvey, "and then walk over on it? I don't believe it's more than up to our waists on the bridge."

"You don't know how deep it is," said Harry; 'and when you get to the bridge, ten to one more than half the planks have been floated off, and you'd go slump to the bottom of the creek before you knew it. There's no way but to get a boat."

"I don't know where you're going to find one," said Harvey. "There's a boat up at the mill-pond, but you couldn't get it out and down here in much less than a day."

"John Walker has his boat afloat again," said Harry, "but that's over on the other side. What a nuisance it is that there isn't anybody over there! If we didn't want 'em, there'd be about sixty or seventy darkies hanging about now."

"Oh, no!" said Harvey, "not so many as that; not over forty-seven."

"I'm going over to Lewston's. Perhaps he knows of a boat," said Harry; and away he ran.

But Lewston was not in his cabin, and so Harry hurried along a road in the woods that led by another negro cabin about a half-mile away, thinking that the old man had gone off

in that direction. Every minute or two he shouted at the top of his voice, "Oh, Lewston!"

Very soon he heard some one shouting in reply, and he recognized Lewston's voice. It seemed to come from the creek.

Thereupon, Harry made his way through the trees and soon caught sight of the old colored man. He was in a boat, poling his way along in the shallow water as close to dry land as the woods allowed him, and sometimes, where the trees were wide apart, sending the boat right between some of their tall trunks.

"Hello, Lewston," cried Harry, running as near as he could go without getting his shoes wet, for the water ran up quite a distance among the trees in some places. "What are you about? Where did you get that boat? I want a boat."

"Dat's jist what I thought, Mah'sr Harry," said Lewston, still poling away as hard as he could. "I know de compuny'd want to git ober de creek, an' I jist went up to Hiram Anderson's and borrowed his ole boat. Ise been a-bailing her out all de mornin'."

"You're a trump, Lewston," said Harry.

"Pole her down opposite your house, and then one of us will go over. Why don't you go out farther? You can't get along half as fast in here by the trees and hummocks as you could in deeper water."

"You don't ketch me out dar in dat runnin' water," said Lewston. "I'd be in the middle afore I knowed it, and dis pole's pooty short."

"Well, come along as fast as you can," cried Harry, "and I'll run down to your house and get your axe to cut a longer pole."

By the time Harry had found a tall young sapling, and had cut it down and trimmed it off, Lewston arrived with the boat.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Crossing the Creek.

"NOW, then," said Harry, "here's the boat and a good pole, and you've nothing to do, Harvey, but just to get in and push yourself ovet to your station as fast as you can.

But the situation did not seem to strike Harvey very favorably. He looked rather dissatisfied with the arrangement made for him.

"I can't swim," he said. "At least, not much, you know."

"Well, who wants you to swim?" said Harry, laughing. "That's a pretty joke. Are you thinking of swimming across, and towing the boat after you? You can push her over easy enough; that pole will reach the bottom anywhere."

"Dat's so," said old Lewston. "It'll touch de bottom ob de water, but I don't know 'bout de bottom ob de mud. Ye musn't push her

down too deep. Dar's 'bout as much mud as water out dar in de creek.

The more they talked about the matter, the greater became Harvey's disinclination to go over. He was not a coward, but he was not used to the water or the management of a boat, and the trip seemed much more difficult to him than it would have appeared to a boy accustomed to boating.

"I tell you what we'll do," cried Harry, at last. "You take my station, Harvey, and I'll go over and work your end of the line."

There was no opposition to this plan, and so Harry hurried off with Harvey to Lewston's cabin and helped him to make the connections and get the line in working order at that end, and then he ran down to the boat, jumped in, and Lewston pushed him off.

Harry poled the boat along quite easily through the shallow water, and when he got farther out he found that he proceeded with still greater ease, only he did not go straight across, but went a little too much down stream.

But he pushed out strongly toward the opposite shore, and soon reached the middle of

the creek. Then he began to go down stream very fast indeed. Push and pole as he would, he seemed to have no control whatever over the boat. He had had no idea that the current would be so strong.

On he went, right down toward the bridge, and as the boat swept over it, one end struck an upright beam that projected above the water, and the clumsy craft was jerked around with such violence that Harry nearly tumbled into the creek.

He heard Lewston and Harvey shouting to him, but he paid no attention to them. He was working with all his strength to get the boat out of the current and into shallower water. But as he found that he was not able to do that, he made desperate efforts to stop the boat by thrusting his pole into the bottom. It was not easy to get the pole into the mud, the current was so strong; but he succeeded at last, by pushing it out in front of him, in forcing it into the bottom; and then, in a moment, it was jerked out of his hand, as the boat swept on, and, a second time, he came near tumbling overboard.

Beard

Now he was helpless. No, there was the short pole that Lewston had left in the boat.

He picked it up, but he could do nothing with it. If it had been an oar, now, it might have been of some use. He tried to pull up the seat, but it was nailed fast.

On he rapidly floated, down the middle of the stream; the boat sometimes sidewise, sometimes with one end foremost, and sometimes the other. Very soon he lost sight of Lewston and Harvey, and the last he saw of them they were hurrying by the edge of the water, in the woods. Now he sat down, and looked about him. The creek appeared to be getting wider and wider, and he thought that if he went on at that rate he must soon come to the river. The country seemed unfamiliar to him. He had never seen it, from the water, when it was overflowed in this way.

He passed a wide stretch of cultivated fields, mostly planted in tobacco, but he could not recollect what farmer had tobacco down by the creek this year. There were some men at work on a piece of rising ground, but they were a long

way off. Still, Harry shouted to them, but they did not appear to hear him.

Then he passed on among the trees again, bumping against stumps, turning and twisting, but always keeping out in the middle of the current. He began to be very uneasy, especially as he now saw, what he had not noticed before, that the boat was leaking badly.

He made up his mind that he must do something soon, even if he had to take off his clothes and jump in and try to swim to shore. But this, he was well aware, would be hard work in such a current.

Looking hurriedly around, he saw, a short distance before him, a tree that appeared to stand almost in the middle of the creek, with its lower branches not very high above the water. The main current swirled around this tree, and the boat was floating directly toward it.

Harry's mind was made up in an instant. He stood up on the seat, and as the boat passed under the tree he seized the lowest branch.

In a moment the boat was jerked from under his feet, and he hung suspended over the rushing water.

He gripped the branch with all his strength, and giving his legs a swing, got his feet over it. Then, after two or three attempts, he managed to draw himself up and get first one leg and then his whole body over the branch. Then he sat up and shuffled along to the trunk, against which he leaned with one arm around it, all in a perspiration, and trembling with the exertion and excitement.

When he had rested awhile, he stood up on the limb and looked toward the land. There, to his joy, he saw, at a little distance, a small log-house, and there was some one living in it, for he saw smoke coming from the log and mud chimney that was built up against one end of the cabin.

Harry gave a great shout, and then another, and another, and presently a negro woman came out of the cabin and looked out over the creek. Then three colored children came tumbling out, and they looked out over the creek.

Then Harry shouted again, and the woman saw him.

"Hello, dar!" she cried. "Who's dat?"

"It's me! Harry Loudon."

"Harry Loudon?" shouted the woman, running down to the edge of the water. "Mah'sr John Loudon's son Harry? What you doin' dar? Is you fishin'?"

"Fishing!" cried Harry. "No! I want to get ashore. Have you a boat?"

"A boat! Lors a massy! I got no boat, Mah'sr Harry. How did ye git dar?"

"Oh, I got adrift, and my boat's gone! Isn't there any man about?"

"No man about here," said the woman. "My ole man's gone off to de railroad. But he'll be back dis evenin'."

"I can't wait here till he comes," cried Harry. "Haven't you a rope and some boards to make a raft?"

"Lor', no! Mah'sr Harry. I got no boards."

"Tell ye what ye do, dar," shouted the biggest boy, a woolly-headed urchin, with nothing on but a big pair of trousers that came up under his arms and were fastened over his shoulders by two bits of string, "jist you come on dis side and jump down, an' slosh ashore."

"It's too deep," cried Harry.

"No, 'tain't," said the boy. "I sloshed out to dat tree dis mornin'."

"You did, you Pomp!" cried his mother. "Oh! I'll lick ye fur dat, when I git a-hold of ye!"

"Did you, really?" cried Harry.

"Yes, I did," shouted the undaunted Pomp. "I sloshed out dar an' back agin."

"But the water's higher now," said Harry.

"No, 'tain't," said the woman. "'Tain't riz much dis mornin'. Done all de risin' las' night. Dat tree's jist on de edge of de creek bank. If Pomp could git along dar, you kin, Mah'sr Harry! Did ye go out dar, sure 'nuff, you Pomp? Mind, if ye didn't, I'll lick ye!"

"Yes, I did," said Pomp; "clar out dar an' back agin."

"Then I'll try it," cried Harry; and clambering around the trunk of the tree, he jumped off as far as he could toward shore.

CHAPTER XXIV.

The First Business Telegrams.

WHEN Harry jumped from the tree, he came down on his feet, in water not quite up to his waist, and then he pushed in toward land as fast as he could go. In a few minutes, he stood in the midst of the colored family, his trousers and coat-tails dripping, and his shoes feeling like a pair of wet sponges.

"Ye ought to have rolled up yer pants and tooked off yer shoes and stockin's afore ye jumped, Mah'sr Harry," said the woman.

"I wish I had taken off my shoes," said Harry.

The woman at whose cabin Harry found himself was Charity Allen, and a good, sensible woman she was. She made Harry hurry into the house, and she got him her husband's Sunday trousers, which she had just washed and ironed, and insisted on his putting them on,

while she dried his own. She hung his stockings and his coat before the fire, and made one of the boys rub his shoes with a cloth so as to dry them as much as possible before putting them near the fire.

Harry was very impatient to be off, but Charity was so certain that he would catch his death of cold if he started before his clothes were dry that he allowed himself to be persuaded to wait.

And then she fried some salt pork, on which, with a great piece of corn-bread, he made a hearty meal, for he was very hungry.

"Have you had your dinner, Charity?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, Mah'sr Harry; long time ago," she said.

"Then it must be pretty late," said Harry, anxiously.

"Oh, no!" said she; "'tain't late. I reckon it can't be much mor' 'n four o'clock."

"Four o'clock!" shouted Harry, jumping up in such a hurry that he like to have tripped himself in Uncle Oscar's trousers, which were much too long for him. "Why, that's dreadfully late.

Where can the day have gone? I must be off, right away!"

So much had happened since morning, that it was no wonder that Harry had not noticed how the hours had flown.

The ride to the creek, the discussions there, the delay in getting the boat, the passage down the stream, which was much longer than Harry had imagined, and the time he had spent in the tree and in the cabin, had, indeed, occupied the greater part of the day.

And even now he was not able to start. Though he urged her as much as he could, he could not make Charity understand that it was absolutely necessary that he must have his clothes, wet or dry; and he did not get them until they were fit to put on. And then his shoes were not dry, but, as he intended to run all the way to Aunt Judy's cabin, that did not matter so much.

"How far is it to Aunt Judy's?" he asked, when at last he was ready to start.

"Well, I reckons it's 'bout six or seben miles, Mah'sr Harry," said Charity.

"Six or seven miles!" exclaimed Harry. "When shall I get there!"

"Now don't hurry and git yese'f all in a heat," said Charity. "Jist keep along dis path fru de woods till ye strike de road, and that'll take ye straight to de bridge. Wish I had a mule to len' ye."

"Good-by, Charity," cried Harry. "I'm ever so much obliged." And hurriedly searching his vest pockets, he found a ten-cent note and a few pennies, which he gave to the children, who grinned in silent delight, and then he started off on a run.

But he did not run all the way.

Before long he began to tire a little, and then he settled down into a fast walk. He felt that he must hurry along as fast as he was able. The fortunes of the Crooked Creek Telegraph Company depended upon him. If the company failed in this, its first opportunity, there was no hope for it.

So on he walked, and before very long he struck the main road. Here he thought he should be able to get along faster, but there was no particular reason for it. In fact, the open

road was rather rougher than that through the woods. But it was cooler here than under the heavy, overhanging trees.

And now Harry first noticed that the sun was not shining. At least, it was behind the western hills. It must be growing very late, he thought.

On he went, for a mile or two, and then it began to grow dusky. Night was surely coming on.

At a turn in the wood, he met a negro boy with a tin bucket on his head. Harry knew him. It was Tom Haskins.

"Hello, Tom!" said Harry, stopping for a moment; "I want you."

"What you want, Mah'sr Harry?" asked Tom.

"I want you to come to Aunt Judy's cabin and carry some messages over to Hetertown for me."

"When you want me?" said Tom; "to-morrer mornin'?"

"No; I want you to-night. Right away. I'll pay you."

"To-night?" cried the astonished Tom.

'Go ober dar in de dark! Can't do dat, Mah'sr Harry. Ise 'fraid to go fru de woods in de dark."

"Nonsense," cried Harry. "Nothing's going to hurt you. Come on over."

"Can't do it, Mah'sr Harry, no how," said Tom. "Ise got ter tote dis hyar buttermilk home; dey's a-waitin' fur it now. But p'r'aps Jim'll go fur you. He kin borrer a mule and go fur you, Mah'sr Harry, I 'spects."

"Well, tell Jim to get a mule and come to Aunt Judy's just as quick as he can. I'll pay him right well."

"Dat's so, Mah'sr Harry; Jim'll go 'long fur ye. I'll tell him."

"Now be quick about it," cried Harry. "I'm in a great hurry." And off he started again.

But as he hurried along, his legs began to feel stiff and his feet were sore. He had walked very fast, so far, but now he was obliged to slacken his pace.

And it grew darker and darker. Harry thought he had never seen night come on so fast. It was certainly a long distance from Charity's cabin to Aunt Judy's.

At last he reached the well-known woods near the bridge, and off in a little opening he saw Aunt Judy's cabin. It was so dark now that he would not have known it was a cabin, had he not been so familiar with it.

Curiously enough, there was no light to be seen in the house. Harry hurried to the door and found it shut. He tried to open it, and it was locked. Had Aunt Judy gone away? She never went away; it was foolish to suppose such a thing.

He knocked upon the door, and receiving no answer, he knocked louder, and then he kicked. In a minute or two, during which he kept up a continual banging and calling on the old woman, he heard a slight movement inside. Then he knocked and shouted, "Aunt Judy!"

"Who dar!" said a voice within.

"It's me! Harry Loudon!" cried Harry. "Let me in!"

"What ye want dar?" said Aunt Judy. "Go 'way from dar."

"I want to come in. Open the door."

"Can't come in hyar. Ise gone to bed."

"But I must come in," cried Harry, in des-

peration; "I've got to work the line. They're waiting for me. Open the door, do you hear, Aunt Judy?"

"Go 'way wid yer line," said Aunt Judy, crossly. "Ise abed. Come in der mornin'. Time enough in de day-time to work lines."

Harry now began to get angry. He found a stone and he banged the door. He threatened Aunt Judy with the law. He told her she had no right to go to bed and keep the company out of their station, when the creek was up; but, from her testy answers, his threats seemed to have made but little impression upon her. She didn't care if they stopped her pay, or fined her, or sent her to prison. She never heard of "sich bisness, a-wakin' people out of their beds in the middle o' the night fur dem foolin' merchines."

But Harry's racket had a good effect, after all. It woke up Aunt Judy, and after a time she got out of bed, uncovered the fire, blew up a little blaze, lighted a candle, and putting on some clothes, came and opened the door, grumbling all the time.

"Now den," said she, holding the candle over her head, and looking like a black Witch of

Ender just out of the ground, "What you want?"

"I want to come in,' said Harry.

"Well, den, come in," said she.

Harry was not slow to enter, and having made Aunt Judy bring him two candles, which he told her the company would pay for, he set to work to get his end of the line in working order.

When all was ready, he sat down to the instrument and "called" Harvey.

He felt very anxious as he did this. How could he be sure that Harvey was there? What a long time for that poor fellow to wait, without having any assurance that Harry would get across the creek at all, much less reach his post, and go to work.

"He may suppose I'm drowned," thought Harry, "and he may have gone home to tell the folks."

But there was such a sterling quality about Harvey that Harry could not help feeling that he would find him in his place when he telegraphed to him, no matter how great the delay or how doubtful the passage of the creek.

But when he called there was no answer.

Still he kept the machine steadily ticking. He would not give up hoping that Harvey was there, although his heart beat fast with nervous anxiety. So far, he had not thought that his family might be frightened about him. *He* knew he was safe, and that had been enough. He had not thought about other people.

But as these ideas were running through his head and troubling him greatly, there came a "tick, tick" from the other side, then more of them, but they meant nothing. Some one was there who could not work the instrument.

Then suddenly came a message:

Is that you, Harry?

Joyfully, Harry answered:

Yes. Who wants to know?

The answer was:

Your father. He has just waked me up.—HARVEY.

With a light heart, Harry telegraphed, as briefly as possible, an account of his adventures; and then his father sent a message, telling him that the family had heard that he had been carried away, and had been greatly troubled about

him, and that men had ridden down the stream after him, and had not returned, and that he, Mr. Loudon, had just come to Lewston's cabin, hoping for news by telegraph. Harvey had been there all day. Mr. Loudon said he would now hurry home with the good news, but before bidding his son good night, he told him that he must not think of returning until the creek had fallen. He must stay at Aunt Judy's, or go over to Hetertown.

When this had been promised, and a message sent to his mother and Kate, Harry hastened to business. He telegraphed to Harvey to transmit the company's messages as fast as he could; a boy would soon be there to take them over to Hetertown. The answer came:

What messages?

Then Harry suddenly remembered that he had had the messages in the breast-pocket of his coat all the time!

He dived at his pocket. Yes, there they were!

Was there ever such a piece of absurdity? He had actually carried those despatches across the creek! After all the labor and expense of

building the telegraph, this had been the way that the first business messages had crossed Crooked Creek!

When Harry made this discovery he burst out laughing. Why, he might as well have carried them to Hetertown from Charity's cabin. It would really have been better, for the distance was not so great.

Although he laughed, he felt a little humiliated. How Tom Selden, and indeed everybody, would laugh if they knew it!

But there was no need to tell everybody, and so when he telegraphed the fact to Harvey, he enjoined secrecy. He knew he could trust Harvey.

And now he became anxious about Jim. Would he be able to borrow a mule, and would he come?

Every few minutes he went to the door and listened for the sound of approaching hoofs, but nothing was to be heard but the low snoring of Aunt Judy, who was fast asleep in a chair by the fireplace.

While thus waiting, a happy thought came into Harry's head. He opened the messages—

he had a right to do that, of course, as he was an operator and had undertaken to transmit them—and he telegraphed them, one by one, to Harvey, with instructions to him to send them back to him.

"They shall come over the creek on our line, anyway," said Harry to himself.

It did not take long to send them and to receive them again, for there were only three of them. Then Harvey sent a message, congratulating Harry on this happy idea, and also suggested that he, Harvey, should now ride home, as it was getting late, and it was not likely that there would be any more business that night.

Harry agreed to this, urging Harvey to return early in the morning, and then he set to work to write out the messages. The company had not yet provided itself with regular forms, but Harry copied the telegrams carefully on note-paper, with which, with pen and ink, each station was furnished, writing them, as far as possible, in the regular form and style of the ordinary telegraphic despatch. Then he put them in an envelope and directed them to Mr. Lyons, at

Hetertown, indorsing them, "In haste. To be transmitted to destination immediately."

"Now then," thought he, "nobody need know how these came over in the first place, until we choose to tell them, and we won't do that until we've sent over some messages in the regular way, and have proved that our line is really of some use. And we won't charge the Mica Company anything for these despatches. But yet, I don't know about that. I certainly brought them over, and trouble enough I had to do it. I'll see about charging, after I've talked it over with somebody. I reckon I'll ask father about that. And I haven't delayed the messages, either; for I've been waiting for Jim. I wonder where that boy can be!" And again Harry went out of doors to listen.

Had he known that Jim was at that moment fast asleep in his bed at home, Harry need not have gone to the door so often.

At last our operator began to be very sleepy, and having made up his mind that if Jim arrived he would certainly wake him up, he aroused Aunt Judy, who was now too sleepy to scold, and having succeeded in getting her to lend him

a blanket (it was her very best blanket, which she kept for high days and holidays, and if she had been thoroughly awake she would not have lent it for the purpose), and having spread it on the floor, he lay down on it and was soon asleep.

Aunt Judy blew out one of the candles and set the other on the hearth. Then she stumbled drowsily into the next room and shut the door after her. In a few minutes every living creature in and about the place was fast asleep, excepting some tree-frogs and katydids outside, who seemed to have made up their minds to stay up all night.

CHAPTER XXV.

Profits and Projects

THE next morning, Harry was up quite early, and after having eaten a very plain breakfast, which Aunt Judy prepared for him, he ran down to the creek to see what chance there was for business.

There seemed to be a very good chance, for the creek had not fallen, that was certain. If there was any change at all, the water seemed a little higher than it was before.

Before long, Harvey arrived on the other side, accompanied by Tom Selden and Wilson Ogden, who were very anxious to see how matters would progress, now that there was some real work to do.

The boys sent messages and greetings backward and forward to each other for about an hour, and then old Miles arrived with his mail-

bag, which contained quite a number of telegrams, this time.

Not only were there those on the business of the Mica Company, but Mr. Darby, the storekeeper at Akeville, thought it necessary to send a message to Hetertown by the new line, and there were two or three other private telegrams, that would probably never have been sent had it not been for the novelty of the thing.

But that rascal, Jim Haskins, did not make his appearance, and when Harry found that it was not likely that he would come at all, he induced Aunt Judy to go out and look for some one to carry the telegrams to Hetertown. Harry had just finished copying the messages—and this took some time, for he wrote each one of them in official form—when Aunt Judy returned, bringing with her a telegraphic messenger.

It was Uncle Braddock.

"Here's a man to take yer letters," said Aunt Judy, as she ushered in the old man.

Harry looked up from his table in surprise.

"Why, Uncle Braddock," said he, "you can't carry these telegrams. I want a boy, on a mule or a horse, to go as fast as he can."

"Lor' bress ye, Mah'sr Harry," said the old negro, "I kin git along fas' enough. Aunt Judy said ye wanted Jim, an' Nobleses mule; but dat dar mule he back hindwards jist about as much as he walks frontwards. I jist keep right straight along, an' I kin beat dat dar ole mule, all holler. Jist gim me yer letters, an' I'll tote 'em ober dar fur ten cents. Ye see I wuz cotched on dis side de creek, an' wuz jist comin ober to see Aunt Judy, when she telled me ob dis job. I'll tote yer letters, Mah'sr Harry, fur ten cents fur de bag-full."

"I haven't a bag-full," said Harry; "but I reckon you'll have to take them. There's nobody else about, it seems, and I can't leave the station."

So Uncle Braddock was engaged as telegraph-boy, and Harry having promised him twenty cents to go to Hetertown and to return with any telegrams that were there awaiting transmission to the other side of the creek, the old man set off with his little package, in high good humor with the idea of earning money by no harder work than walking a few miles.

Shortly after noon, he returned with a few

messages from Hetertown, and by that time there were some for him to carry back. So he made two trips and forty cents that day—quite an income for Uncle Braddock.

In the evening, Jim Haskins made his appearance with his mule. He said his brother hadn't told him anything about Harry's wanting him until that afternoon. Notwithstanding Uncle Braddock's discouraging account of the mule, Jim was engaged as messenger during the time that the creek should be up, and Uncle Braddock was promised a job whenever an important message should come during Jim's absence.

The next day it rained, and the creek was up, altogether, for five days. During this time the telegraph company did a good deal of paying business. Harry remained at his station, and boarded and lodged with Aunt Judy. He frequently sent messages to his father and mother and Kate, and never failed, from an early hour in the morning until dark, to find the faithful Harvey at his post.

At last the creek "fell," and the bridge became again passable to Miles and his waddling

horse. The operators disconnected their wires, put their apparatus in order, locked the wooden cases over their instruments, and rode in triumph (Mr. Loudon had come in the buggy for Harry) to Akeville.

Harry was received with open arms by his mother and Kate; and Mrs. Loudon declared that this should be the last time that he should go on such an expedition.

She was right.

The next afternoon there was a meeting of the Board of Managers of the Crooked Creek Telegraph Company, and the Secretary, having been hard at work all the morning, with the assistance of the Treasurer and the President, made a report of the financial results of the recent five days' working of the company's line.

It is not necessary to go into particulars, but when the sums due the company from the Mica Company and sundry private individuals had been set down on the one side, and the amounts due from the telegraph company to Aunt Judy for candles and board and lodging for one operator; to Uncle Braddock and Jim Haskins for

services as messengers; to Hiram Anderson for damages to boat (found near the river, stuck fast among some fallen timber, with one end badly battered by floating logs), and for certain extras in the way of additional stationery, etc., which it had become necessary to procure from Hetertown, had been set down on the other side, and the difference between the sums total had been calculated, it was found, and duly reported, that the company had made six dollars and fifty-three cents.

This was not very encouraging. It was seldom that the creek was up more than five days at a time, and so this was a very favorable opportunity of testing the value of the line as a money-making concern.

It was urged, however, by the more sanguine members of the Board that this was not a fair trial. There had been many expenses which probably would not have to be incurred again.

"But they didn't amount to so very much," said Kate, who, as Treasurer, was present at the meeting. "Aunt Judy only charged a dollar and a half for Harry's board, and the boat was

only a dollar. And all the other expenses would have to be expected any time."

After some further conversation on the subject, it was thought best to attend to present business rather than future prospects, and to appoint committees to collect the money due the company.

Harry and Tom Selden were delegated to visit the mica-mine people, while Harvey, Wilson Ogden, and Brandeth Price composed the committee to collect what was due from private individuals.

Before Harry started for the mica mine, he consulted his father in regard to charging full price for the telegrams which he carried across the creek in his pocket.

Mr. Loudon laughed a good deal at the transaction, but he told Harry that there was no reason why he should not charge for those telegrams. He had certainly carried them over in the first place, and the subsequent double transmission over the wire was his own affair.

When Harry and Tom rode over to the mica mine the next morning, and explained their business and presented their bill, their account was

found to be correct, and the amount of the bill was promptly handed to them.

When this little business had been transacted, Mr. Martin, the manager of the mine, invited them to sit down in his office and have a talk.

"This line of yours," said he, "is not going to pay you."

"Why not?" asked Harry, somewhat disturbed in mind by this sudden statement of what he had already begun to fear was an unpleasant truth.

"It *has* paid us," said Tom Selden. "Why, we've only been working it five days, on regular business, and we've cleared—well, we've cleared considerable."

"That may be," said the manager, smiling, "but you can't have made very much, for you must have a good many expenses. The principal reason why I think it won't pay you is that you have to keep up two stations, and you all live on this side of the creek. I've heard that one of you had a hard time getting over the creek last week."

"That was Harry," said Tom.

"So I supposed," said Mr. Martin; "and it

must have been a pretty dangerous trip. Now it won't do to do that sort of thing often; and you can't tell when the creek's going to rise, so as to be over before the bridge is flooded."

"That's true," said Harry. "Crooked Creek doesn't give much notice when it's going to rise."

"No, it don't," continued Mr. Martin. "And it won't do, either, for any one of you to live on the other side, just to be ready to work the line in time of freshets. The creek isn't up often enough to make that pay."

"But what can we do?" asked Harry. "You surely don't think we're going to give up this telegraph line just as it begins to work, and after all the money that's been spent on it, and the trouble we've had?"

"No, I don't think you are the kind of fellows to give up a thing so soon, and we don't want you to give it up, for it's been a great deal of use to us already. What I think you ought to do is to run your line from the other side of the creek to Hetertown. Then you'd have no trouble at all. When the creek was up you could go down and work this end, and an

arrangement could easily be made to have the operator at Hetertown work the other end, and then it would be all plain sailing. He could send the telegrams right on, on the regular line, and there would be no trouble or expense with messengers from the creek over to Hetertown."

"That would be a splendid plan," said Harry; "but it would cost like everything to have a long line like that."

"It wouldn't cost very much," said Mr. Martin. "There are pine woods nearly all the way, by the side of the road, and so it wouldn't cost much for poles. And you've got the instruments for that end of the line. All you'll have to do would be to take them over to Hetertown. You wouldn't have to spend any money except for wire and for trimming off the trees and putting up the wire."

"But that would be more than we could afford," said Tom Selden. "You ought just to try to make the people about here subscribe to anything, and you'd see what trouble it is to raise money out of them."

"Oh, I don't think you need let the want of money enough to buy a few miles of wire pre-

vent your putting up a really useful line," said Mr. Martin; "our company would be willing to help you about that, I'm sure."

"If you'd help, that would make it altogether another thing," said Harry; "but you'd have to help a good deal."

"Well, we would help a good deal," said Mr. Martin. "It would be to our benefit, you know, to have a good line. That's what we want, and we're willing to put some money in it. I suppose there'd be no difficulty in getting permission to put up the line on the land between the creek and Hetertown?"

"Oh, no!" said Harry. "A good part of the woods along the road belong to father, and none of the people along there would object to us boys putting up our line on their land."

"I thought they wouldn't," said Mr. Martin. "I'll talk to our people about this, and see what they think of it."

As Harry and Tom rode home, Harry remarked, "Mr. Martin's a trump, isn't he? I hope the rest of the mica-mine people will agree with him."

"I don't believe they will," said Tom.

"Why, you see they'd have to pay for the whole thing, and I reckon they won't be in a hurry to do that. But wouldn't we have a splendid line if they were to do it?"

"I should say so," said Harry. "It's almost too good a thing to expect. I'm afraid Mr. Martin won't feel quite so generous when he calculates what it will cost."

CHAPTER XXVI.

A Grand Proposition.

THE summer vacation was now over, and the Board of Managers of the telegraph company, as well as the other boys of the vicinity, were obliged to go to school again and study something besides the arts of making money and transacting telegraphic business. But as there was not much business of this kind to be done, the school interfered with the company's affairs in little else than the collection of money due from private individuals for telegraphic services rendered during the late "rise" in the creek. The committee which had charge of this collection labored very faithfully for some time, and before and after school and during the noon recess, the members thereof made frequent visits to the houses of the company's debtors. As there were not more than half-a-dozen debtors, it might have been sup-

posed that the business would be speedily performed. But such was not the case. Mr. Darby, the storekeeper, paid his bill promptly; and old Mr. Truly Matthews, who had telegraphed to Washington to a nephew in the Patent Office Department, "just to see how it would go," paid what he owed on the eighth visit of Wilson Ogden to his house. He had not seen "how it would go," for his nephew had not answered him, either by telegraph or mail, and he was in no hurry to pay up, but he could not stand "that boy opening his gate three times a day." As for the rest, they promised to settle as soon as they could get some spare cash —which happy time they expected would arrive when they sold their tobacco.

It is to be supposed that no one ever bought their tobacco, for they never paid up.

The proceeds of the five days of telegraphing, together with the money obtained by the sale of Harry's gun, were spent by Kate for Aunt Matilda's benefit; and as she knew that it might be a good while before there would be any more money coming, Kate was as economical as she could be.

It was all very proper and kind to make the old woman's income hold out as long as possible, but Aunt Matilda did not like this systematic and economical way of living. It was too late in life for her, she said, "to do more measurin' at a meal than chewin';" and so she became discouraged, and managed, one fine morning, to hobble up to see Mrs. Loudon about it.

"Ise afraid dese chillen ain't a-gwine to hold out," said she. "I don know but what I'd better go 'long to the poor-house, arter all. And there's that money I put inter de comp'ny. I ain't seen nothin' come o' dat ar money yit."

"How much did you put in, Aunt Matilda?" asked Mrs. Loudon.

"Well, I needn't be a-sayin' jist how much it was; but it was solid silver, anyway, and I don't reckon I'll ever see any of it back again. But it don't differ much. Ise an old woman, and them chillen is a-doin' their best."

"Yes, they are," said Mrs. Loudon; "and I think they're doing very well, too. You haven't suffered for anything lately, have you?"

"Well, no," said the old woman, "I can't

say that I've gone hungry or nuthin'; but I was only a-gittin' 'fraid I might. Dis hyar 'tic'lar way o' doin' things makes a person scary."

"I am glad that Kate is particular," said Mrs. Loudon. "You know, Aunt Matilda, that money isn't very plenty with any of us, and we all have to learn to make it go as far as it will. I don't think you need feel 'scary,' if Kate's economy is all you have to fear."

This interview somewhat reassured Aunt Matilda, but she was not altogether satisfied with the state of things. The fact was that she had supposed that the telegraph company would bring in so much money that she would be able to live in what to her would be a state of comparative luxury. And instead of that, Kate had been preaching economy and systematic management to her. No wonder she was disappointed, and a little out of humor with her young guardians.

But for all that, if Harry or Kate had fallen into a fiery crater, Aunt Matilda would have hurried in after them as fast as her old legs would have carried her.

She went back to her cabin, after a while, and

she continued to have her three meals a day all the same as usual; but if she could have seen, as Kate saw, how steadily the little fund for her support was diminishing day by day, she would have had some reason for her apprehensions.

It was on a pleasant Saturday in early September, that Harry stood looking over the front gate in his father's yard. Kate was at the dining-room window, sewing. Harry was thinking, and Kate was wondering what he was thinking about. She thought she knew, and she called out to him: "I expect old Mr. Matthews would lend you a gun, Harry."

"Yes, I suppose he would," said Harry, turning and slowly walking up toward the house; "but father told me not to borrow a gun from Truly Matthews. It's a shame, though, to stay here when the fields are just chock full of partridges. I never knew them so plenty in all my life. It's just the way things go."

"It is a pity about your gun," said Kate. "There's some one at the gate, Harry. Hadn't you better go and see what he wants? Father won't be home until after dinner, you can tell him."

Harry turned.

"It's Mr. Martin," said he, and he went down to the gate to meet him.

"How do you do, Mr. President?" said Mr. Martin. "I rode over here this morning, and thought I would come and see you."

Harry shook hands with his visitor, and invited him to walk into the house; but after Mr. Martin had dismounted and fastened his horse, he thought that the seat under the catalpa-tree looked so cool and inviting, that he proposed that they should sit down there and have a little chat.

"I have been thinking about the extension of your telegraph line," said the manager of the mica mine, "and have talked it over with our people. They agree with me that it would be a good thing, and we have determined, if it suits you and your company, that we will advance the money necessary to carry out the scheme."

"I'm glad to hear that," said Harry; "but, as I said before, you'll have to bear the whole expense, and it will cost a good deal to carry the line from the creek all the way to Hetertown."

"Yes, it will cost some money," said Mr. Martin; "but our idea is that you ought to have a complete line while you are about it, and that it ought to run from our mine to Hetertown."

"From your mine to Hetertown!" exclaimed Harry, in astonishment.

"Yes," said Mr. Martin, smiling. "That is the kind of a line that is really needed. You see, our business is increasing, and we are buying land which we intend to sell out in small farms, and so expect to build up quite a little village out there in time. So you can understand that we would like to be in direct communication with Richmond and the North. And if we can have it by means of your line, we are ready to put the necessary funds into the work."

Harry was so amazed at this statement, that he could hardly find words with which to express himself.

"Why, that would give us a regular, first-class telegraph line!" he exclaimed.

"Certainly," said Mr. Martin, "and that's the only kind of a line that is really worth anything."

"I don't know what to think about it," said Harry. "I didn't expect you to propose anything like this."

"Well," said Mr. Martin, rising, "I must be off. I had only a few minutes to spare, but I thought I had better come and make you this proposition. I think you had better lay it before your Board of Managers as soon as possible, and if you will take my advice, as a business man, you'll accept our offer."

So saying, he bid Harry good-by, took off his hat to Kate, who was still looking out of the window, mounted his horse, and rode away.

There was a meeting of the Board of Managers of the Crooked Creek Telegraph Company that afternoon. It was a full meeting, for Harry sent hasty messengers to those he called the "out-lying members."

A more astonished body of officials has seldom been seen than was our Board when Harry laid the proposition of Mr. Martin before it.

But the boys were not so much amazed that they could not jump at this wonderful opportunity, and in a very short time it was unanimously

voted to accept the proposition of the mica-mine people, and to build the great line.

Almost as soon as this important vote had been taken, the meeting adjourned, and the members hurried to their several homes to carry the news.

"We'll have to change our name," said Tom Selden to Harry. "We ought to call our company 'The United States Mica and Hetertown Lightning Express Line,' or something big like that."

"Yes," replied Harry. "The A 1 double-action, back-spring, copper-fastened, broad-gauge telegraph line from here to the moon!"

And away he ran to meet Kate, who was coming down the road.

CHAPTER XXVII.

How Something Came to an End.

THE mica-mine management appeared to be thoroughly in earnest about this extension of the telegraph line. As soon as the assent of the Board of Managers to the scheme had been communicated to them, they sent a note to Harry suggesting that he should, in the name of his company, get the written consent of owners of the lands over which the line would pass to the construction of said line on their property. This business was soon settled, for none of the owners of the farms between the mines and Hetertown, all of whom were well acquainted with Mr. Loudon (and no man in that part of the country was held in higher estimation by his neighbors), had the slightest objection to the boys putting up their telegraph line on their lands.

When Harry had secured the necessary

promises, the construction of the line was commenced forthwith. The boys had very little trouble with it. Mr. Martin got together a gang of men, with an experienced man to direct them, and came down with them to Akeville, where Harry hired them; and finding that the foreman understood the business, he told him to go to work and put up the line. When pay-days came around, Harry gave each man an order for his money on the Mica Mine Company, and their wages were paid them by Mr. Martin.

It was not very long before the line was constructed and the instruments were in working order in Hetertown and at the mica mines. There was a person at the latter place who understood telegraphy, and he attended to the business at that end of the line, while Mr. Lyons worked the instruments at the Hetertown station, which was in the same building with the regular telegraph line.

It was agreed that the Mica Company should keep an account of all messages sent by them over the line, and should credit the Crooked Creek Telegraph Company with the

amount due in payment, after deducting necessary expenses, hire of operators', and six per cent. on the capital advanced.

Everything having been arranged on this basis, the extended line went into operation, without regard to the amount of water in the creek, and old Miles carried no more telegrams to Hetertown.

The telegraph business, however, became much less interesting to Kate and the boys. It seemed to them as if it had been taken entirely out of their hands, which was, indeed, the true state of the case. They were the nominal owners and directors of the line, but they had nothing to direct, and very vague ideas about the value of the property they owned.

"I don't know," said Tom Selden, as he sat one afternoon in Mr. Loudon's yard, with Harry and Kate, "whether we've made much by this business or not. Those mica people keep all the accounts and do all the charging, and if they want to cheat us, I don't see what's to hinder them."

"But you know," said Harry, "that we can examine their accounts; and, besides, Mr.

Lyons will keep a tally of all the messages sent, and I don't believe that he would cheat us."

"No; I don't suppose he would," said Tom; "but I liked the old way best. There was more fun in it."

"Yes, there was," said Kate; "and then we helped old Lewston and Aunt Judy. I expect they'll miss the money they got for rent."

"Certainly," said Harry. "They'll have to deny themselves many a luxury in consequence of the loss of that dollar a month."

"Now you're making fun," said Kate; "but twelve dollars a year is a good deal to those poor people."

"I suppose it is," said Harry. "In fifty years, it would be six hundred dollars, if they saved it all up, and that is a good deal of money, even to us rich folks."

"Rich!" said Kate. "We're so dreadfully rich that I have only forty-two cents left of Aunt Matilda's money, and I must have some very soon."

The consequence of this conversation was that Harry had to ride over to the mica mines,

and get a small advance on the payment due at the end of the month.

The end of the month arrived, and the settlement was made. When the interest on the money advanced to put up the line, hire of operators, and other expenses, had been deducted from the amount due the Crooked Creek Company, there was only two dollars and a quarter to be paid to it!

Harry was astounded. He took the money, rode back to Akeville, and hastened to have a consultation with Kate. For the first time since he become a guardian, he was in despair. This money was not enough for Aunt Matilda's needs, and if it had been, there were stockholders who were expecting great things from the recent extension of the line. What was to be said to them?

Harry didn't know, and Kate could suggest nothing. It appeared to be quite plain that they had made a very bad business of this telegraphic affair. A meeting of the Board was called, and when each member had had his say, matters appeared worse than ever.

It was a very blue time for our friends.

As for Kate, she cried a good deal that afternoon.

The time had at last come when she felt they would have to give up Aunt Matilda. She was sure, if they had never started this telegraphic company, they might have struggled through the winter, but now there were stockholders and creditors and she did not know what all. She only knew that it was too much for them.

Three days after this, Harry received a note from Mr. Martin. When he read it, he gave a shout that brought everybody out of the house—Kate first. When she read the note, which she took from Harry as he was waving it around his head, she stood bewildered. She could not comprehend it.

And yet it simply contained a proposition from the Mica Mine Company to buy the Crooked Creek Telegraph Line, with all its rights and privileges, assuming all debts and liabilities, and to pay therefor the sum of three hundred and fifty dollars in cash!

. . . . . .

Two days afterward, the line was formally

sold to the Mica Company, and the Crooked Creek Telegraph Company came to an end.

When accounts were settled, Aunt Matilda's share of the proceeds of the sale were found to amount to two hundred and sixty-two dollars and fifty cents, which Kate deposited with Mr. Darby for safe keeping.

It was only the sky that now looked blue to Harry and Kate.

The Akeville people were a good deal surprised at this apparently singular transaction on the part of the Mica Company, but before long, their reasons for helping the boys to put up their line and then buying it, became plain enough.

The Mica Company had invested a large capital in mines and lands, and the business required telegraphic communication with the North. The managers knew that they might have a good deal of trouble to get permission to put up their line on the lands between the mines and Hetertown, and so they wisely helped the boys to put up the line, and then bought it of them, with all their rights and privileges.

There was probably some sharp practice in this transaction, but our young friends and Aunt Matilda profited by it.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A Meeting.

ABOUT a week after the dissolution of the Crooked Creek Company, Harry was riding over from Hetertown, and had nearly reached the creek on his way home, when he met George Purvis.

This was their first meeting since their fight, for George had been away on a visit to some relatives in Richmond.

When Harry saw George riding slowly toward him, he felt very much embarrassed, and very much annoyed because he was embarrassed.

How should he meet George? What should he say; or should he say anything?

He didn't want to appear anxious to "make up" with him, nor did he want to seem as if he bore malice toward him. If he only knew how George felt about it!

As it was, he wished he had stopped somewhere on the road. He had thought of stopping at the mill—why hadn't he? That would just have given George time to pass.

Both boys appeared to be riding as slowly as their horses would consent to go, and yet when they met, Harry had not half made up his mind what he would say, or how he should say it, or whether it would be better or not to say anything.

"Hello, George!" said he, quite unpremeditatedly.

"Hello!" said George, reining in his horse. "Where are you going?"

"Going home," said Harry, also stopping in the road.

Thus the quarrel came to an end.

"So you've sold the telegraph?" said George.

"Yes," said Harry. "And I think we made a pretty good bargain. I didn't think we'd do so well when we started."

"No, it didn't look like it," said George; "but those mica men mayn't find it such a good bargain for them."

"Why?" asked Harry.

"Well, suppose some of the people who own the land that the line's on, don't want these strangers to have a telegraph on their farms. What's to hinder them ordering them off?"

"They wouldn't do that," said Harry. "None of the people about here would be so mean. They'd know that it might upset our bargain. There isn't a man who would do it."

"All right," said George. "I hope they won't. But how are you going to keep the old woman now?"

"How?" said Harry. "Why, we can keep her easy enough. We got three hundred and fifty dollars from the Mica Company."

"And how much is her share?"

"Over two hundred and sixty," answered Harry.

"Is that all?" said George. "That won't give her much income. The interest on it will only be about fifteen dollars a year, and she can't live on that."

"But we didn't think of using only the interest," said Harry.

"So you're going to break in on the principal, are you? That's a poor way of doing."

"Oh, we'll get along well enough," said Harry. "Two hundred and sixty dollars is a good deal of money. Good-by! I must get on. Come up, Selim!"

"Good-by!" said George; and he spurred up his horse and rode off gayly.

But not so Harry. He was quite depressed in spirits by George's remarks. He wished he had not met him, and he determined that he would not bother his head by looking at the matter as George did. It was ridiculous.

But the more he thought of it, the more sorry he felt that he had met George Purvis.

CHAPTER XXIX

Once more in the Woods.

"HARRY," said Kate, the next day after this meeting, "when are you going to get your gun back?"

"Get my gun back!" exclaimed Harry. "How am I to do that?"

"Why, there's money enough," answered Kate. "You only lent your gun-money to Aunt Matilda's fund. Take out enough, and get your gun back."

"That sounds very well," said Harry; "but we haven't so much money, after all. The interest on what we have won't begin to support Aunt Matilda, and we really ought not to break in on the principal."

Kate did not immediately answer. She thought for a while and then she said:

"Well, that's what I call talking nonsense. You must have heard some one say something

like that. You never got it out of your own head."

"It may not have come out of my own head," said Harry, who had not told Kate of his meeting with George Purvis, "but it is true, for all that. It seems to me that whatever we do seems all right at first, and then fizzles out. This telegraph business has done that, straight along."

"No, it hasn't," said Kate, with some warmth. "It's turned out first-rate. I think that interest idea is all stuff. As if we wanted to set up Aunt Matilda with an income that would last forever! Here comes father. I'm going to ask him about the gun."

When Mr. Loudon had had the matter laid before him, he expressed his opinion without any hesitation.

"I think, Harry," said he, "that you certainly ought to go and get your gun."

And Harry went and got it.

The rest of that day, which was Saturday, was delightful, both to Harry and Kate. Harry cleaned and polished up his gun, and Kate sat and watched him. It seemed like old times.

During those telegraphic days, when they were all thinking of business and making money, they seemed to have grown old.

But all that was over now, and they were a girl and a boy again. Late in the afternoon, Harry went out and shot half-a-dozen partridges, which were cooked for supper, and Mrs. Loudon said that that seemed like the good old style of things. She had feared that they were never going to have any more game on their table.

On the following Wednesday there was a half-holiday, and Harry was about to start off with his gun, when he proposed that Kate should go with him.

"But you're going after birds," said Kate, "and I can't go where you'll want to go—among the stubble and bushes."

"Oh! I sha'n't go much after birds," said Harry. "I wanted to borrow Captain Caseby's dog, but he's going to use him himself to-day, and so I don't expect to get much game. But we can have a good walk in the woods."

"All right," said Kate. "I'll go along." And away she went for her hat.

The walk was charming. It was now Sep-

tember, and the fields were full of bright-colored fall flowers, while here and there a sweet-gum tree began to put on autumn tints. The sun was bright, and there was a strong breeze full of piney odors from the forests to the west.

They saw no game; and when they had rambled about for an hour or so, they sat down under an oak-tree on the edge of the woods, and while they were talking, an idea came into Harry's head. He picked a great big fat toad-stool that was growing near the roots of the tree, and carrying it about sixty feet from the tree, he stuck it up on a bush.

"Now then," said he, taking up his gun, cocking it, and handing it to Kate, "you take a shot at that mark."

"Do you mean that I shall shoot at it?" exclaimed Kate.

"Certainly," said Harry. "You ought to know how to shoot. And it won't be the first time you have fired a gun. Take a shot."

"All right," said Kate. And she took off her hat and threw it on the grass. Then she took the gun and raised it to a level with her eye.

"Be easy now," said Harry. "Hold the butt close against your shoulder. Take your time, and aim right at the middle of the mark."

"I'm afraid I'm shutting the wrong eye," said Kate. "I always do."

"Shut your left eye," said Harry. "Get the sight right between your other eye and the mark."

Kate took a good long aim, and then, summoning all her courage, she pulled the trigger.

The gun went off with a tremendous bang! The toadstool trembled for an instant, and then tumbled off the bush.

"Hurra!" shouted Harry. "You've hit it fair!" And he ran and brought it to her, riddled with shot-holes. Kate was delighted with her success, and would have been glad to have spent the rest of the afternoon firing at a mark. But Harry was not well enough supplied with powder and shot for that. However, he gave her another shot at a piece of paper on the bush. She made three shot-holes in it, and Harry said that would do very well. He then loaded up again, and then they started off for home. The path they took led through a corner of the woods.

They had not gone far before they met Gregory Montague.

"Oh, Mah'sr Harry!" said Gregory, "I done foun' a bees' nes'."

"Where?" cried Harry.

"Down in a big tree in de holler, dar," pointing over toward the thickest part of the woods. "You have to go fru de brush and bushes, but it's a powerful big nest, Mah'sr Harry, right in de holler ob de tree."

"Are you sure it's a bees' nest?" said Harry. "How do you know?"

"I knows it's a bees' nest," said Gregory, somewhat reproachfully. "Didn't I see de bees goin' in an' out fru a little hole?"

"Kate," said Harry, "you hold this gun a little while. I'll run down there and see if it is really a bee-tree that he has found. Hold it under your arm, that way, with the muzzle down. That's it. I'll be back directly." And away he ran with Gregory.

And now Kate was left alone in the woods with a gun under her arm. It was a new experience for her. She felt proud and pleased to have control of a gun, and it was not long before she

began to think that it would be a splendid thing if she could shoot something that would do for supper. How surprised they would all be if she should bring home some game that she had shot, all by herself!

She made up her mind that she would do it, if she could see anything to shoot.

And so she walked quietly along the path with her thumb on the hammer of the gun, all ready to cock it the instant she should see a good chance for a shot.

CHAPTER XXX.

A Girl and a Gun.

A SHORT distance beyond the place where Kate had been left, there was a small by-path; and when, still carefully carrying her gun, she reached this path, Kate stopped. Here would be a good place, she thought, to wait for game. Something would surely come into that little path, if she kept herself concealed.

So she knelt down behind a small bush that grew at a corner of the two paths, and putting her gun through the bush, rested the barrel in a crotch.

The gun now pointed up the by-path, and there was an opening in the bush through which Kate could see for some distance.

Here, then, she watched and waited.

The first thing that crossed the path was a very little bird. It hopped down from a twig, it jerked its head about, it pecked at something

on the ground, and then flew up into a tree. Kate would not have shot it on any account, for she knew it was not good to eat; but she could not help wondering how people ever did shoot birds, if they did not "hold still" any longer than that little creature did.

Then there appeared a small brown lizard. It came very rapidly right down the path toward Kate.

"If it comes all the way," thought Kate, "I shall have to jump."

But it did not come all the way, and Kate remained quiet.

For some time no living creatures, except butterflies and other insects, showed themselves. Then, all of a sudden, there popped into the middle of the path, not very far from Kate, a real, live rabbit!

It was quite a good-sized rabbit, and Kate trembled from head to foot. Here was a chance indeed!

To carry home a fat rabbit would be a triumph. She aimed the gun as straight toward the rabbit as she could, having shut the wrong eye several times before she got the matter

arranged to her satisfaction. Then she remembered that she had not cocked the gun, and so she had to do that, which, of course, made it necessary for her to aim all over again.

She cocked only one hammer, and she did it so gently that it did not frighten the rabbit, although he flirted his ears a little when he heard the "click, click!" Everything was so quiet that he probably thought he heard some insect, probably a young or ignorant cricket that did not know how to chirp properly.

So he sat very still and nibbled at some leaves that were growing by the side of the path. He looked very pretty as he sat there, taking his dainty little bites, and jerking up his head every now and then, as if he were expecting somebody.

"I must wait till he's done eating," thought Kate. "It would be cruel to shoot him now."

Then he stopped nibbling all of a sudden, as if he had just thought of something, and as soon as he remembered what it was, he twisted his head around and began to scratch one of his long ears with his hind foot. He looked so funny doing this that Kate came near laughing;

but, fortunately, she remembered that that would not do just then.

When he had finished scratching one ear, he seemed to consider the question whether or not he should scratch the other one; but he finally came to the conclusion that he wouldn't. He'd rather hop over to the other side of the path and see what was there.

This, of course, made it necessary for Kate to take a new aim at him.

Whatever it was that he found on the other side of the path it grew under the ground, and he stuck his head down as far as he could get it, and bent up his back, as if he were about to try to turn a somersault, or to stand on his head.

"How round and soft he is!" thought Kate. "How I should like to pat him. I wonder when he'll find whatever it is that he's looking for! What a cunning little tail!"

The cunning little tail was soon clapped flat on the ground, and Mr. Bunny raised himself up and sat on it. He lifted his nose and his fore-paws in the air and seemed to be smelling something good. His queer little nose wiggled so

comically that Kate again came very near bursting out laughing.

"How I would love to have him for a pet!" she said to herself.

After sniffing a short time, the rabbit seemed to come to the conclusion that he was mistaken, after all, and that he didn't really smell anything so very good. He seemed disappointed, however, for he lifted up one of his little fore-paws and rubbed it across his eyes. But, perhaps, he wasn't so very sorry, but only felt like taking a nap, for he stretched himself out as far as he could, and then drew himself up in a bunch, as if he were going to sleep.

"I wish he wouldn't do that," thought Kate, anxiously. "I don't want to shoot him in his sleep."

But Bunny wasn't asleep. He was thinking. He was trying to make up his mind about something. There was no way of finding out what it was that he was trying to make up his mind about. He might have been wondering why some plants didn't grow with their roots uppermost, so that he could get at them without rubbing his little nose in the dirt; or why trees

were not good to eat right through trunk and all. Or he might have been trying to determine whether it would be better for him to go over to 'Lijah Ford's garden, and try to get a bite at some cabbage-leaves; or to run down to the field just outside of the woods, where he would very likely meet a certain little girl rabbit that he knew very well.

But whatever it was, he had no sooner made up his mind about it than he gave one big hop and was out of sight in a minute.

"There!" cried Kate. "He's gone!"

"I reckon he thought he'd guv you 'bout chance enough, Miss Kate," said a voice behind her, and turning hurriedly, she saw Uncle Braddock.

"Why, how did you come here?" she exclaimed. "I didn't hear you."

"Reckon not, Miss Kate," said the old man. "You don't s'pose I was agoin' to frighten away yer game. I seed you a-stoopin' down aimin' at somethin', and I jist creeped along a little at a time, to see what it was. Why, what *did* come over you, Miss Kate, to let that ole har go? It was the puttiest shot I ever did see."

"Oh! I couldn't fire at the dear little thing while it was eating so prettily," said Kate, letting down the hammer of the gun as easily as she could; "and then he cut up such funny little capers that I came near laughing right out. I couldn't shoot him while he was so happy, and I'm glad I didn't do it at all."

"All right, Miss Kate," said Uncle Braddock, as he started off on his way through the woods; "that may be a werry pious way to go a-huntin', but it won't bring you in much meat."

When Harry came back from hunting for the bee-tree, which he didn't find, he saw Kate walking slowly down the path toward the village, the gun under her arm, with the muzzle carefully pointed toward the ground.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A Man in a Boat.

ON a very pleasant afternoon that fall, a man came down Crooked Creek in a small flat-bottomed boat. He rowed leisurely, as if he had been rowing a long distance and felt a little tired. In one end of the boat was a small trunk.

As this man, who had red hair, and a red face, and large red hands, pulled slowly along the creek, turning his head every now and then to see where he was going, he gradually approached the bridge that crossed the creek near "One-eyed Lewston's" cabin. Just before he reached the bridge, he noticed what seemed to him a curious shadow running in a thin straight line across the water. Resting on his oars, and looking up to see what there was above him to throw such a shadow, he perceived a telegraph wire stretching over the creek, and losing itself to sight in the woods on each side.

A telegraph wire was an ordinary sight to this man, but this particular wire seemed to astonish him greatly.

"What on earth is this?" he asked out loud. But there was no one to answer him, and so, after puzzling his mind for a few minutes, he rowed on.

When that man reached the point in the creek to which he was bound, and, with his trunk on his shoulder, walked up to the house where he used to live, he was still more astonished; for a telegraph wire ran through one corner of the back yard.

Cousin Maria now lived in this house, and George Mason was coming to pay her a visit. His appearance was rather a surprise to her, but still she welcomed him. She was a good soul.

Almost before he asked her how she was, he put the question to her:

"What telegraph line's that?"

So Cousin Maria wiped her hands on her long gingham apron (she had been washing her best set of china), and she sat down and told him all about it.

"You see, George," said she, "that there line

was the boys' telegraph line, afore they sold it to the mica people; and when the boys put it up they expected to make a heap of money, which I reckon they didn't do, or else they wouldn't have sold it. But these mica people wanted it, and they lengthened it at both ends, and bought it of the boys—or rather of Harry Loudon, for he was the smartest of the lot, and the real owner of the thing—he and his sister Kate—as far as I could see. And when they stretched the line over to Hetertown, they came to me and told me how the line ran along the road most of the way, but that they could save a lot of time and money (though I don't see how they could save much of a lot of money when, accordin' to all accounts, the whole line didn't cost much, bein' just fastened to pine-trees, trimmed off, and if it had cost much, them boys couldn't have built it, for I reckon the mica people didn't help 'em a great deal, after all) if I would let them cut across my grounds with their wire, and I hadn't no objection, anyway, for the line didn't do no harm up there in the air, and so I said certainly they might, and they did, and there it is."

When George Mason heard all this, he

walked out of the back-door and over to the wood-pile, where he got an axe and cut down the pole that was in Cousin Maria's back yard. And when the pole fell, it broke the wire, just as Mr. Martin had got to the sixth word of a message he was sending over to Hetertown.

Cousin Maria was outraged.

"George Mason!" said she, "you can stay here as long as you like, and you can have part of whatever I've got in the house to eat, but I'll never sit down to the table with you till you've mended that wire and nailed it to another pole."

"All right," answered George Mason. "Then I'll eat alone."

When Mr. Martin and the mica-mine people and the Akeville people and Harry and Kate and all the boys and everybody black and white heard what had happened, there was great excitement. It was generally agreed that something must be done with George Mason. He had no more right to cut down that pole because he had once lived on the place, than he had to go and cut down any of the neighbors' bean-poles.

So the sheriff and some deputy sheriffs (Tony

Kirk among them), and a constable and a number of volunteer constables, went off after George Mason, to bring him to justice.

It was more than a week before they found him, and it is probable that they would not have captured him at all, had he not persisted in staying in the neighborhood, so as to be on hand with his axe, in case the line should be repaired.

"It's all along of my tellin' him that that line was got up by them Loudon children," said Cousin Maria. "He hates Mr. Loudon worse than pisen, because he was the man that found out all his tricks."

Mason was taken to the court-house and locked up in the jail. Almost all the people of the county, and some people belonging to adjoining counties, made up their minds to be at the court-house when his trial should take place.

On the second night of his imprisonment, George Mason forced open a window of his cell and went away. And what was more, he staid away. He had no desire to be at the court-house when his trial took place.

No one felt more profound satisfaction when

George Mason left the country, and the telegraph line was once more in working order, than Harry and Kate.

They had an idea that if George Mason should persist in cutting the telegraph line, the Mica Company would give it up, and that they might be called upon to refund the money on which Aunt Matilda depended for support. They had been told that they need not trouble themselves about this, as the Mica Company had taken all risks; but still they were delighted when they heard that George Mason had cleared out, and that there was every reason to suppose that he would not come back.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Aunt Matilda's Letter.

ONE afternoon, about the end of October, Aunt Matilda was sitting in her big straight-backed chair, on one side of her fireplace. There was a wood fire blazing on the hearth, for the days were getting cool and the old woman liked to be warm. On the other side of the fireplace sat Uncle Braddock. Sitting on the floor, between the two, were John William Webster and Dick Ford. In the doorway stood Gregory Montague. He was not on very good terms with Aunt Matilda, and was rather afraid to come in all the way. On the bed sat Aunt Judy.

It must not be supposed that Aunt Matilda was giving a party. Nothing of the kind. These colored people were not very much engrossed with business at this time of the year; and as it was not far from supper-time, and as

they all happened to be near Aunt Matilda's cabin that afternoon, they thought they'd step in and see her.

"Does any of you uns know," asked Aunt Matilda, "whar Ole Miles is now? Dey tells me he don't carry de mails no more."

"No," said John William Webster, who was always quick to speak. "Dey done stop dat ar. Dey got so many letters up dar at de mica mines, dat dey send all the big ones to de pos'-office in a bag an' a buggy, and dey send de little ones ober de telegraph."

"But whar's Ole Miles?" repeated Aunt Matilda.

"He's a-doin' jobs up aroun' de mines," said Uncle Braddock. "De las' time I see him he was a-whitewashin' a fence."

"Well, I wants to see Ole Miles," said Aunt Matilda. "I wants him to carry a letter fur me."

"I'll carry yer letter, Aunt Matilda," said Dick Ford; and Gregory Montague, anxious to curry favor, as it was rapidly growing near to ash-cake time, stated in a loud voice that he'd take it "fus thing in de mornin'."

"I don' want none o' you uns," said Aunt Matilda. "Ole Miles is used to carryin' letters, and I wants him to carry my letter. Ef you'd like ter keep yerse'f out o' mischief, you Greg'ry, you kin go 'long and tell him I wants him to carry a letter fur me."

"I'll do that," said Gregory, "fus' thing in de mornin'."

"Better go 'long now," said Aunt Matilda.

"Too late now, Aunt Matilda," said Gregory, anxiously. "Couldn't git dar 'fore dark, no how, and he'd be gone away, and I 'spect I couldn't fin' him."

"Whar is yer letter?" asked Uncle Braddock.

"Oh, 'tain't writ yit," said Aunt Matilda. "I wants some o' you uns to write it fur me. Kin any o' you youngsters write writin'?"

"Yes, ma'am," said John William Webster. "Greg'ry kin write fus-rate. He's been ter school mor'n a month."

"You shet up!" cried Gregory, indignantly. "Ise been to school mor'n dat. Ise been free or four weeks. And I know'd how to write some 'fore I went. Mah'sr George teached me."

"You'd better git Miss Kate to write yer letter," said Aunt Judy. "She'd spell it out a great sight better dan Gregory Montague, I reckons."

"No, I don't want Miss Kate to write dis hyar letter. She does enough, let alone writin' letters fur me. Come 'long hyar, you Greg'ry. Reach up dar on dat shelf and git dat piece o' paper behin' de 'lasses gourd."

Gregory obeyed promptly, and pulled out a half-sheet of note-paper from behind the gourd. The paper had been there a good while, and was rather yellow-looking. There was also a drop of molasses on one corner of it, which John William said would do to seal it up with; but Gregory wiped it carefully off on the leg of his trousers.

"Now, den," said Aunt Matilda; "sot yer-se'f right down dar on de floor. Git off dat ar smooth board, you Dick, an' let Greg'ry put his paper dar. I hain't got no pen, but hyar's a pencil Miss Kate lef' one day. But it ain't got no pint. Ef some of you boys has got a knife, ye kin put a pint to it."

Uncle Braddock dived into the recesses of his

dressing-gown, and produced a great jack-knife, with a crooked iron blade and a hickory handle.

"Look a-dar!" cried John William Webster. "Uncle Braddock's agwine ter chop de pencil up fur kindlin'-wood."

"None o' yer laughin' at dis knife," said Uncle Braddock, with a frown. "I done made dis hyar knife mese'f."

A better knife, however, was produced by Dick Ford, and the pencil was sharpened. Then Gregory Montague stretched himself out on the floor, resting on his elbows, with the paper before him and the pencil in his hand.

"Is you ready?" said Aunt Matilda.

"All right," said Gregory. "Yer can go 'long."

Aunt Matilda put her elbows on her knees and her chin in her hands, and looked into the fire. Gregory and every one else waited quite a while for her to begin.

"Ye had better put de number ob de year fus," suggested Uncle Braddock.

"Well, ye 'kin put dat," said Aunt Matilda, "while I'm a-workin' out de letter in my mind."

There now arose a discussion as to what was

the "number of the year." Aunt Judy knew that the "war" was somewhere along in "sixty," and thought it must certainly be seventy or eighty by this time; while Uncle Braddock, who was accustomed to look back a long way, was sure it was "nigh on to a hun'red."

Dick Ford, however, although he was not a writer, could read, and had quite a fancy for spelling out a newspaper, and he asserted that the year was eighteen hundred and seventy, and so it was put down "180070," much to the disgust of Uncle Braddock, who didn't believe it was so much.

"Yer ought to say ef it's before Christ or after Christ," said Aunt Judy. "Old Mah'sr Truly Mathers 'splained dat to me, 'bout years."

"Well, then," said Gregory, ready with his pencil, "which is it?"

Dick Ford happened to know a little on the subject, and so he told Gregory how he should put down "B. C." for "before Christ," and "A. C." for "after Christ," and that "A. C." was right for this year.

This was set down in Gregory's most careful lettering.

"Dat dar hind letter's got the stumic-ache," said John William Webster, putting his long finger, black on top and yellow underneath, on the C, which was rather doubled up.

Nobody thought of the month or the day, and so the letter was considered dated.

"Now, den," said Gregory, "who's it to?"

"Jist never you mind who's it to," answered Aunt Matilda. "I know, an' that's enough to know."

"But you've got to put de name on de back," said Aunt Judy, anxiously.

"Dat's so," said Uncle Braddock, with equal anxiety.

"No, I hain't," remarked Aunt Matilda. "I'll tell Ole Miles who to take it to. Put down for de fus' thing:

"'Ise been thinkin' fur a long time dat I oughter to write about dis hyar matter, and I s'pose you is the right one to write to.'"

"What matter's dat?" asked Aunt Judy.

"Neber you mind," replied Aunt Matilda.

Slowly and painfully, Gregory printed this sentence, with Dick Ford close on one side of him; with John William's round, woolly head stuck almost under his chin; with Uncle Brad-

dock leaning over him from his chair; and Aunt Judy standing, peering down upon him from behind.

"Dat's wrong," said Dick Ford, noticing that Gregory had written the last words thus: "rite 1 ter rite 2." "She don't want no figgers."

"What did she say 'em fur, den?" asked Gregory.

"Now, Greg'ry," said Aunt Matilda, "put down dis:

"'I don't want to make no trouble, and I wouldn't do nothin' to trouble dem chillen; but Ise been a-waitin' a good long while now, and I been thinkin' I'd better write an' see 'bout it.'"

"What you want to see 'bout?" asked Aunt Judy, quickly.

"Neber you min' what it is," replied Aunt Matilda. "Go on, you Greg'ry, and put down:

"'Dat money o' mine was reel money, and when I put it in, I thought I'd git it back ag'in afore dis.'"

"How much was it, Aunt Matilda?" asked Uncle Braddock, while Aunt Judy opened her eyes and her mouth, simply because she could not open her ears any wider than they were.

"Dat's none o' your business," replied Aunt Matilda. "Now put down:

"'I 'spect dem telegrum fixin's cost a lot o' money, but I don't 'spect it's jist right to take all an ole woman's money to build 'em.'"

"Lor's *ee!*" ejaculated Uncle Braddock, "dat's so!"

"Now you Greg'ry," continued Aunt Matilda, "put down:

"'Ef you write me a letter 'bout dat ar money, you kin giv it to Ole Miles.'

Now sign my name to dat ar letter."

The next day, having been summoned by the obliging Gregory, Old Miles made his appearance in Aunt Matilda's cabin.

The old woman explained to him that the letter was so important that she could trust it to no one who was not accustomed to carry letters, and Miles was willing and proud to exercise his skill for her benefit.

"Now, den," said she; "take dis hyar letter to de man what works de telegrum in Hetertown, and fotch me back an answer."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Time to Stop.

ABOUT a week after this letter was written, Kate said to Harry:

"You really ought to have Aunt Matilda's roof mended. There are several holes in it. I think her house ought to be made tight and warm before winter; don't you?"

"Certainly," said Harry. "I'll get some shingles and nail them over the holes to-morrow."

The next day was Saturday, and a rainy day. About ten o'clock Harry went to Aunt Matilda's cabin with his shingles and a hammer and nails. Kate walked over with him.

To their surprise they found the old woman in bed.

"Why, what is the matter, Aunt Matilda?" asked Kate. "Are you sick?"

"No, honey, I isn't sick," said the old

woman; "but somehow or other I don't keer to git up. Ise mighty comfurt'ble jist as I is."

"But you ought to have your breakfast," said Kate. "What is this basin of water doing on the foot of your bed?"

"Oh, don't 'sturb dat ar tin basin," said Aunt Matilda. "Dat's to ketch der rain. Dar's a hole right ober de foot o' de bed."

"But you won't want that now," said Kate. "Harry's going to nail shingles over all the holes in your roof."

"An' fall down an' break his neck. He needn't do no sich foolishness. Dat ar tin basin's did me fur years in and years out, and I neber kicked it ober yit. Dere's no use a-mendin' holes dis time o' day."

"It's a very good time of day," said Harry, who was standing in the door; "and it isn't raining now. You used to have a ladder here, Aunt Matilda. If you'll tell me where it is, I can mend that hole over your bed without getting on the roof at all."

"Jist you keep away from de roof," said the old woman. "Ef you go hammerin' on dat ole

roof you'll have it all down on me head. I don't want no mendin' dis time o' day."

Finding that Aunt Matilda was so much opposed to any carpenter-work on her premises at that time, Harry went home, while Kate remained to get the old woman some breakfast.

Aunt Matilda felt better that afternoon, and she sat up and ate her supper with Uncle Braddock (who happened to be there); but as she was evidently feeling the effects of her great age, an arrangement was made, by which Aunt Judy gave up her cabin and came to live with Aunt Matilda and take care of her.

One morning, about a week after the rainy Saturday, Mrs. Loudon came over to see Aunt Matilda. She found the old woman lying on the bed, and evidently worried about something.

"You see, Miss Mary," said Aunt Matilda, "Ise kind o' disturbed in me min'. I rit a letter a long time ago, and Ole Miles ain't fetched me no answer yit, and it sorter worries me."

"I didn't know you could write," said Mrs. Loudon, somewhat surprised.

"Neither I kin," said Aunt Matilda. "I

jist got dat Greg'ry Montague to write it fur me, and dear knows what he put in it."

"Who was your letter to, Aunt Matilda?" asked Mrs. Loudon.

"I do' know his name, but he works de telegrum at Hetertown. An' I do' min' tellin' you 'bout it, Miss Mary, ef you do' worry dem chillen. De letter was 'bout my money in de telegrum comp'ny. Dat was reel silber money, an' I hain't heerd nor seed nothin' of it sence."

When Mrs. Loudon went home she told Harry and Kate of Aunt Matilda's troubles.

Neither of them said anything at the time, but Harry put on his hat and went up to the store, while Kate sat down to her sewing.

After a while, she said:

"I think, mother, it's pretty hard in Aunt Matilda, after all we've done for her, to think of nothing but that ten cents she put into the stock of the company."

"It is perfectly natural," said Mrs. Loudon. "That ten cents was her own private property, and no matter how small a private property may be, it is of greater interest to the owner than any other property in the world. To be sure,

the money that was paid for the telegraph line is for Aunt Matilda's benefit, but you and Harry have the management and the spending of it. But that ten cents was all her own, and she could spend it just as she chose."

The next day Kate went over to Aunt Matilda with two silver ten-cent pieces that Harry had got from Mr. Darby.

"Aunt Matilda," said she, "this is not the very same ten-cent piece you put into the company, but it's just as good; and Harry thinks that you about doubled your money, and so here's another one."

The old woman, who was sitting alone by the fire wrapped up in a shawl, took the money, and putting it in the hollow of her bony hand, gazed at it with delight.

Then she looked up at Kate.

"You is good chillen," she said. "You is mighty good chillen. I don't 'spect I'll lib much longer in dis hyar world. Ise so precious old dat it's 'bout time to stop. But I don't 'spects I'll find nobody in heben that'll be more reel comfort to me dan you chillen."

"Oh, Aunt Matilda!" cried Kate. "Why,

you'll meet all your friends and relations that you talk so much about and who died so long ago."

"Well," said Aunt Matilda, very deliberately, "perhaps I shall, and perhaps I sha'n't; dere's no tellin'. But dere ain't no mistakin' 'bout you chillen."

That afternoon, when Uncle Braddock called, Aunt Matilda said to him:

"Ef you see Ole Miles ye kin tell him he needn't bring me no answer to dat letter."

Quite early one morning, a few days after this, Kate went over to Aunt Matilda's cabin.

She saw Aunt Judy standing at the door.

"How's Aunt Matilda?" asked Kate.

"Gone to glory," said Aunt Judy.

Aunt Matilda was buried under a birch-tree near the church that she used to attend when able to walk.

That portion of her "fund" which remained unexpended at the time of her death was used to pay her funeral expenses and to erect a suitable tombstone over her grave. On the stone was an inscription. Harry composed it, and Kate copied it carefully for the stonecutter.

And thus, after much hard labor and anxious thought, after many disappointments and a great deal of discouragement, Harry and Kate performed to the end the generous task they had set themselves, which was just what might have been expected of such a boy and such a girl.

THE END.

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